



In the Wilderness: Coming of Age in Unknown Country

Kim Barnes

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Poet Kim Barnes grew up in northern Idaho, in the isolated camps where her father worked as a logger and her mother made a modest but comfortable home for her husband and two children. Their lives were short on material wealth, but long on the riches of family and friendship, and the great sheltering power of the wilderness. But in the mid-1960's, as automation and a declining economy drove more and more loggers out of the wilderness and into despair, Kim's father dug in and determined to stay. It was then the family turned fervently toward Pentecostalism. It was then things changed.

In the Wilderness is the poet's own account of a journey toward adulthood against an interior landscape every bit as awesome, as beautiful, and as fraught with hidden peril as the great forest itself. It is a story of how both faith and geography can shape the heart and soul, and of the uncharted territory we all must enter to face our demons. Above all, it is the clear-eyed and moving account of a young woman's coming of terms with her family, her homeland, her spirituality, and herself.

In presenting Kim Barnes the 1995 PENJerard Fund Award for a work-in-progress by an emerging female writer, the panel of judges wrote that "*In the Wilderness* is far more than a personal memoir," adding that it stands "almost as a cautionary example of the power of good prose to distinguish whatever it touches." Indeed, *In the Wilderness* is an extraordinary work, courageous, candid, and exquisitely written.

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