

Outlook on Lifestyle

Library review

Prolific essayist explores Wyoming

At a certain point on the Trans-Canada Highway just outside Banff you can look south down the Rocky Mountain Range. The vista of serrated mountain peaks looks so raw you can almost hear the reverberant echoes of wrenching and sundered rock thrusting upward. That sense of immediacy is the more eerie for knowing that what you are looking at is hundreds of thousands, if not millions of years old.

Rising from the plains, by John McPhee is the latest book from this prolific essayist who specialises in what might loosely be called "natural history". Most recently his publications have been deeply involved with geology and the effects of geology on human history and the ecology of human society. This particular volume is a fascinating exploration of the geology of the state of Wyoming, into which he weaves the pioneer family history of a man called David Love who is a supervisor in the United States Geological Survey and acknowledged as "the Grand Old Man of Rocky Mountain geology." The reader joins with Love and McPhee on their wanderings back and forth across the state while Love explains, McPhee ruminates, and the incredibly complex geological history of this unique square of the globe is dissected.

critique of current environmental problems. In a quietly impressive fashion he makes the case that whoever claimed biology was destiny hadn't gone back far enough to first causes - clearly, geology is destiny.

Even for the layman with no knowledge of geology this is an accessible and intriguing view of one of the most fundamental and critical fields of study on Planet Earth. Some small examples: "Petroleum is the transmuted remains of marine algae and other organic debris... as an accident of sedimentation and tectonics the organic remains must be held in a certain narrow range of temperature (not much above and not much below the temperature of boiling water) for at least a million years. That temperature range is known as the petroleum window," or, "...a tectonic coincidence very much worth noting is that the development of the western mountain ranges begins at the same time as the opening of the Atlantic Ocean. In the middle Mesozoic, as the Atlantic opens, the north American lithosphere, like a great rug, begins to slide west, abutting, for the most part, the Pacific Plate. A rug sliding across a room will crumple up against the far wall."

While this rich rock foundation is being built McPhee manages to shed some light on Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, on "Murderers I have known" (a chapter in the unpublished diary of David Love's mother) on the latest theories of plate tectonics and "hot spots", on the decisive role of wind erosion in the formation of the Rockies together with a hefty

Within this short book is a giddy compression of millions of years of geological activity. McPhee's description of the pliability and fluidity of what we have so erroneously called the firmament is enough to cause the susceptible reader a significant degree of suspicion when next treading on "solid ground".

Husband suffers father fixation

DEAR MEG — My husband has so many hang-ups about his father that it's beginning to affect our marriage. We've been married almost two years and his father still comes first in his life.

DEAR MEG



Meg Whitcomb

I could understand this, I think, if their relationship was a loving one, but Dan's father never liked him and hardly gives him the time of day. Dan calls him often, but he rarely calls back. We spend more money than we should on his Christmas and birthday presents, but he seldom bothers to say thank you. He's too busy paying attention to Dan's younger brothers, who are in business with him. He didn't ask Dan to join the business, and I doubt he ever will.

Am I selfish to resent Dan for his efforts to gain his dad's attention? I feel it's a hopeless effort and that he should forget about it. — NEGLECTED, ARK.

DEAR NEGLECTED — No, you're not being selfish. But Dan's feelings aren't going to change just because you want them to. His craving for his

never even seen a check stub. He says he's putting money in a savings account, but I don't know where, and he won't tell me.

Another thing — I'm bored. Either Sid's on the road or he's out with his friends. He rarely comes home at night.

I often think about taking our little boy and leaving, but I have nowhere to go, and I can't afford to live on my own. Right now I'm renting one of Sid's dad's houses. Please give me some advice. — OVERBURDENED, N.C.

DEAR OVER — Some men operate on the theory that "what's yours is mine and what's mine is my own." Just because you had poor judgment at 15 doesn't mean you have to go on living with a teenage mistake.

Most women would have called it quits with a stingy, secretive, selfish guy like Sid long before this. You can afford to live on your own. What you can't afford is your unhealthy addiction to the guy.

father's affection and approval has become obsessive. He needs help to shake loose.

Urge him to get outside help. He may never learn the reason for his father's rejection, but he'll learn that he is a worthy person and can live with it.

DEAR MEG — I'm 21 years old, have a 4-year-old son, and I've been married six years. At first Sid didn't want to work, so I had to get a job. Sid's a truck driver now and makes good money, but I still work because he doesn't help with the bills. He always has money to spend, but I've

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