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Stones Witness

Margaret Randall



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Nine miles down a primitive trail, over hills of sand and rock, across ankle-deep streams, and around mires of quickmud lies Kiet Seel, a thirteenth-century ancestral Puebloan ruin. This is the place, ancient and enduring, from which Margaret Randall begins her meditations in Stones Witness. Randall explores her connections to land and landscape, history and culture, language and memory, drawing from the events of her own rich history to create a universal link between place, time, and identity. A fluid and provocative collection of poetry, prose, and photographs, Stones Witness is in part an account of an extraordinary woman's radically committed and inventive life. Widely known as an author, activist, oral historian, photographer, translator, and teacher, Randall has dedicated her efforts globally to achieving social and environmental change. Yet with a life so varied and so prolific, Randall maintains permanence through her relationship to the earth and its sacred places. And as she situates her own political involvement within a larger cultural context, again and again she returns her focus to the land, the spaces in which people have "birthed and buried . . . made art" for centuries. Randall's tone is lyrical and elegiac, urgent yet gentle, a collage of words and images that is at once gratifying and morally intense. With an artist's sensibility, Randall explores landscapes of the soul and of the past, histories of conquest and assimilation, nuances of gender and womanhood, love and difference, power and its abuses. While Randall's words probe timeless and intimate questions on the nature of being, she grounds these reflections in place. Her words and photographs take us from the paintings surviving on the walls of Kiet Seel to the paintings preserved on the walls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. With her we visit red rock canyons, touch ancient stones, and feel the ebb and flow of the natural world. In a text—a testimony—that is always in motion, Margaret Randall transcends the boundaries between politics and ethics, culture and environment. Stones Witness sutures the edges of time, the gaps of language, the connections between person and place that are essential for the earth's survival-and for ours.

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