

Solitude's Gifts

Sorting out a father's legacy

ROGUE RIVER JOURNAL: A Winter Alone, memoir by John Daniel. Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005. Hardcover, \$26.

At 52, writer John Daniel is a mountain man but not the hardscrabble, grizzled type. He winters-over in a tight, warm cabin in the Rogue River canyon at a homestead owned by mysterious brothers who lend the cabin to selected writers for occasional retreats. Daniel stays 134 days before returning to his home and his wife, Marilyn, in the foothills of the Oregon Coast Range.

Daniel has trucked in plenty of food and enough wine to get by. The water's good, and it's piped into the kitchen and bath. He splits firewood from an ample supply. He plants and tends a vegetable garden that feeds him fresh greens most of the winter. The garden's biggest problem is a lone but ravenous wild turkey, "a lovely female with a blue fuzzy head, a bit of red on her throat, and a gorgeous gold, brown and black-barred carapace of feathers. She slips blithely through the bear fence into the garden every morning, then again in the late afternoon before she shuffles up the drive to her roost in the woods."

Daniel reflects on his father, a professional union organizer, as was his mother before he was born. He has brought with him papers, letters, artifacts and extensive

research about his father's life. He interviewed his mother about their life together, and he carries his own memories, dreams and emotions of his dad. That's a mixed bag of goods to process, as anyone who has tried to think and write about such personal feelings understands.

Daniel doesn't haul in excess emotional baggage such as sentimentality or hero worship to cloud this cognitive process, but like many writers, he yearns to understand his father more deeply both so he can let him go and so he can find himself. Many times he must sort out the complicated feelings he's held for this enigmatic figure.

Throughout the winding narrative of Daniel's own childhood, youth and early adulthood he interlaces stories of his father. He shows us he's vulnerable in their unstable encounters and ponders his father's progressive politics on one hand and his habitual drinking on the other. From various situations and musings, Daniel brings the story back to the cabin and grounds it in the writing task he has set for himself.

"I thought I might become a morning writer here," Daniel confesses. "Alone in the rhythms of light and dark, I imagined I'd get up with the birds and have my workday finished by noon, as the writers I most admire have done, the afternoon and evening mine to nibble like a well-earned

apple. No dice." Embracing his preference for writing in the evening and late at night, he names himself "Scrivener nocturnus" for these night-owl tendencies. Here Daniel launches into one of my favorite passages, a brief essay on darkness and its pleasures:

"Silence gathers with the dark, even as the river whispers a little louder from the bottom of the canyon. Apple trees, fence posts, deer in the meadow, all singular things withdraw into the background, less and less present, insubstantial as fading memories. And then, with dusk, the pointed silhouettes of the trees, monuments of a mystery precisely stated against the glowing sky."

Daniel's memoir is about letting the conscious, thinking mind find a resting place so that dim images from the past might come more clearly into focus and take on a lived, emotional reality

"Rogue River Journal is a witty and wise testament by a man writing at the height of his powers." —Scott Russell Sanders

Rogue River Journal
a winter alone

JOHN DANIEL

that only the writer can evoke.

John Daniel returns to Eugene for a reading at 7 pm on May 24 at the Knight Library Browsing Room. Don't miss him. **EW**

BOOK NOTES (May 19 - June 2): Cartoon concert and book tour with **Eric Drooker**, **Keith Knight** and **Jon Longhi** at 7 pm on 5/19 at DIVA. ... **Bill Sullivan** (*New Hikes in the Central Oregon Cascades*) shows slides at 7:30 pm on 5/20 at Chemetkan Outdoor Club, 360 1/2 State St., Salem. ... "Book Works, Book Arts" explores book art with demonstrations by 15 members of the Emerald Book and Paper Arts Guild at 1 pm on 5/21 at Eugene Downtown Library, with an exhibition on the third floor of the library during May and June. In conjunction, an ongoing exhibition of Northwest Book Arts by 18 regional artists at White Lotus Gallery continues until mid-June. Other exhibits include the UO collection in the circulation area near the UO Knight Library Browsing Room and in the Architecture and Allied Arts Library. See related talk on 5/26, below. ... Former Bookmark employees **James Squires** and **Amelia Reising** are opening a new independent bookstore, Books Without Borders, on 5/23, inside the Strand/Cozmic Pizza building at 8th/Charnelton. ... **Eric Bogosian** (*Wasted Beauty*) reads at ?? on 5/23 in Powell's Books, Portland. ... **John Daniel** (*Rogue River Journal*) reads at 7 pm on 5/24, Knight Browsing Room, UO. ... Nationally recognized book arts expert from University of Washington, **Sandra Kroupa**, explores "Books in the Middle; Books on the Margins" at 7 pm on 5/26 in Knight Library Browsing Room, UO. ... **Laura Notaro** (*We Thought You Would Be Prettier*) reads at 7 pm on 5/26 at Borders Books. ... **Thais Mazur** (*Warrior Mothers*) reads at 7 pm on 5/26 at Mother Kali's. ... Poet, novelist, memoirist **Lynne Sharon Schwartz** (*In solitary: poems*) reads at 7 pm on 5/26 at OSU, Corvallis. ... If you caught the NPR interview with **Shannon Applegate** (*Living Among Headstones*) on Sunday 5/15, you will want to hear her read about her new gig as Sexton of the Applegate Pioneer Cemetery in Yoncalla, Ore., at 7 pm on 6/6 at the Knight Library Browsing Room, UO.

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