

I Have Been Thinking About Mountains

*the mountains*: ... a region remote from civilization. [OED]

44.1034° N, 121.7692° W

(coordinates inked onto my skin because I cannot imagine going somewhere without at least the memory of my mountains)

I have been thinking about mountains.

*Mountains taught me who I am.*

I have been thinking about my mountains because I miss them.

I miss the way their peaks disappear into the clouds. I miss the way they change with the seasons. I miss the way the road fills on Sundays because one winter, two winters, twenty winters does not take away the beauty of snow capped peaks; everyone has to stop and look at those mountains.

*Mountains taught me who I am.*

Sometimes, I forget that my blood is glacier water, my bones lava rock.

But then I remember the way mountains taught me courage, for there is nothing simple or small or cowardly about a mountain. They are born from fire and shaped by ice. Mountains lived before we were there, and they will continue after we are gone.

Mountains taught me to endure. I was taught to endure as I crouched under a glacier that had been melting and reforming for a thousand thousand years. I may see its blood drip from August snow and run down basalt rocks, but that does not mean it has lost the fight against time.

Mountains taught me to strain for the sky. I watched peaks disappear into clouds, going beyond what could be seen into a realm no one knew, a realm full of possibility, and I knew that

was my destiny. I would reach for the clouds, disappear into them, discover what no one else could see.

Mountains taught me jealousy. I am jealous of these mountains, *my mountains*. I have learned there is something that can be found only on those summits, and in those fissures, and beneath that snow. There is something in those heights that is nowhere else. Those are *my mountains* and the only true mountains I have seen. It did not matter that my grandma's mountains were taller, or that there were more of them. They were not "real mountains." I was still not convinced when she showed me how they looked in a cloak of snow, or the numbers ensuring their place as "real mountains."

Nothing could convince me that they were mountains the way my mountains were because there is a simple rule to the people of my mountains. There are our mountains, and then there are everybody else's. And isn't that we don't like other mountains, we just don't like them as much as we like our own.

For we have been raised from the beginning to love our mountains, love our land. From childhood we run through lava fields the mountains gave us, and hid in forests on their slopes.

We have spent summers in the waters created by their snows. We have been lost in their wilderness for a grade because there is a legacy in our mountains that our place is to love and protect our mountains as they have loved and protected us.

Everyone that has grown up in the mountains' shadow knows what every good steward knows. That land is *yours* and you must water it with your blood and your sweat and your tears and your joy. That land has created you, and in return you ensure it will continue to create. Those who grow up with the mountains know that it is not about leaving a mark, but a legacy.

A legacy of courage, and strength, and competence, and appreciation. It is a legacy of North, Middle, and South.

a1903 S. K. CRAVEN in *Eng. Dial. Dict.* (1903) IV. 179/2 [W. Yorkshire] The land isn't worth much; it's only mountain. [OED]

“it's only mountain”

There is never “only” a mountain.

There is a history, a culture, a pride.

*Mountains have taught me who I am.*

And I miss them.

I have been thinking about mountains because “the mountains are calling and I must go.” John

Muir