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QUARTZ MOUNTAIN — SANDS OF CHANGE

by Sondra D. Williams

Hold a quartz crystal in your hand. It's cool, longer than it is big around, and clean-edged on all six sides. Scratch it, it's hard. Hold it to your eye and you'll see pristine clarity, or cracks and breaks from sudden shock, or the tiny workings of another time: sparkles of mica or gold or thin reeds of rutalite.

Take away the romance of quartz crystals and you have the mineral silicon dioxide (SiO₂). It's a common compound in nature and a common element in man's world. It has certain electrical properties, so we use it in oscillators, radio transmitters, and atomic clocks. Quartz is more transparent than glass and polarizes the light it projects, so we use it in lamps. It is beautiful, mystical, and vibrates at specific frequencies, so we use it in jewelry and in healing arts.

They say there used to be crystals of all sizes at Quartz Mountain in southwestern Oklahoma. And clusters bearing multiple crystals, sometimes hundreds, some as tiny as needles and fragile as angel hair, some the size of four-inch pipe that would take you half an hour to cut with a high-speed rock saw. If you'd been among the thousands who ravaged them from the mountain, you might have one on your coffee table today. It could be worth a hundred dollars.

Few crystals are left at Quartz Mountain or any place else in its ancestral range, the 650-million year old Wichitas. The quartz in the Wichitas has turned to granite — man's metaphor for something or someone

strong, hard, enduring.

But the rock is not as solid as it seems. Granite is a blend of quartz and feldspar, an aluminosilicate of potassium, sodium, calcium, and barium. Wind, water, and gravity erode the feldspar and quartz crystals out of the rock. The feldspar breaks down into dirt and mud, but the quartz crystals are stubborn and resist erosion. They are ground down and rounded into sand, the flaked-off skin of granite.

The sand falls into cracks and collects in cavities. It mixes with the other particles that settle there and the 10,000 year process of silicification can begin. Under heat and pressure the dirt and mud turn to fragile shale and the quartz-sand crystals evolve into shimmering sandstone.

Clear quartz has many translucent sisters: purple amethyst, yellow citrine, white cristobalite, gray flint; and solid, multicolored brothers of agate, jasper, chalcedony, and opal. Sandstone born of their melding matures to a landscape of rusty reds and browns, yellows, and muted greens on hills all around Quartz Mountain.

Quartz turns to granite, granite to sand, sand to stone. It's the sandstone that gives Quartz Mountain its name. The air, the atmosphere, is special there. The mountain glitters in the sunlight and on the surface of the lake, a beautiful, electrical, vibration of millions of years ago and millions of years to come.