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QUARTZ MOUNTAIN REVISITED: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

By Alvena Bieri

We autumn hikers traipse out now with our guide over the orange, lichen-covered rocks at Quartz Mountain, at the western end of the Wichita Range. The boulders are smoothed out by the rain, sleet, and wind of eons, strewn around as if by a giant but confused landscaper. We are attending the Oklahoma Arts Institute Writers' Weekend, and we're seeing Nature with a capital N through new eyes.

"A million years ago the mountains were as big as the Rockies," says our guide—a young, slim woman, the Park naturalist. She's blonde, a Sarah Lawrence graduate. How in the world did she end up here in Southwestern Oklahoma, and how did she learn to call chickadees and name snakes, and classify every single weed and wild flower in the mountains?

"Being from the North," she says, "I love it best here when we have wintry weather." And a great deal of moisture has fallen on the Wichitas in certain

through the years, dusting lightly over the red granite, settling on post oak branches, half covering the hackberry bushes, blanking out the tiny, dried-up asters. I can understand why she loves winter.

This is an old world now, and the geologic upheavals of mountain-making are past. Next it's watch and wait for centuries to come, with a kind of peace blowing in the Oklahoma wind, a wind that's not questioned and not resented.

How trite to say that our lives are dwarfed by time. But I begin thinking about human upheavals in this ancient land—tiny happenings lost in the ages, no longer or more important to Nature than the flick of a single eyelash—upheavals that made the frontier human, changed the short grass to cultivated wheat, and brought my grandfather to this brave, new country in 1901. He came to try his luck at the great land lottery at Lawton and drew a farm near Holton. When our grandfather was 12 children, there came



Photographs by Tony Neely

much ordinary living, many grandchildren.

And I begin to put together in my mind and heart exactly why I am so moved by the scenes among these strange red boulders, why this whole afternoon is shaping itself into a deep but painful kind of poem. It is just this: what was left of my grandfather's family came together here at Quartz Mountain in the summer of 1977. We all posed dutifully for the family picture in front of granite boulders, down by the picnic tables. My husband and I had been married a long time then, too long really. Two children were enough. Two jobs were enough. But our life together was not enough. That's not quite accurate. It wasn't that our marriage was inadequate in some ill-defined way--that implies some kind of Yuppie restlessness for something finer or richer. Instead we were both filled with hate and despair. My grandparents were long dead. My mother and father had both died the year before. Could we get a divorce at last and become, as my husband said bitterly, "another statistic?" But by the next

summer, I felt the worst was over. We had sat down with a tablet of yellow paper and divided our assets. The children, 15 and 8, would be better off, we thought. And we would be better off. We were right. After a time, our bitterness changed to relief and between us a quiet civility set in.

Now my world is getting older, settled in most ways, and certainly not in upheaval anymore. Like the very old Wichitas, I'm worn down by events, but certainly peaceful. ■

ALVENA BIERI, originally of Hobart, has taught English at OSU. She is now a free-lance writer and a writer for the STILLWATER NEWSPRESS.