
Run River Run by Ann Zwinger

Source: Our Land Our Literature, Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry in Muncie, Indiana.

<http://www.bsu.edu/ourlandourlit/Literature/Authors/zwingerah.html>

(1925-)

Hoosier Connection: Ann Zwinger grew up in Muncie, Indiana, along the polluted White River. In her naturalist writing, she often uses Indiana as her base for comparison.

Works Discussed: Run River Run, The Near Sighted Naturalist

Ann Zwinger was born March 12, 1925, in Muncie, Indiana. She was the daughter of William and Ann Haymond. She spent most of her youth in Indiana, along the White River. In 1946 Zwinger graduated from Wellesley College with a degree in Art History. She finished her Masters in Art History at Indiana University in 1950. After marrying ex-pilot Herman Zwinger in 1952, she moved around the country, finally settling in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where she wrote her first naturalist book. Since then, Zwinger has authored over a dozen other naturalist books, winning the prestigious Burroughs Award for Run, River, Run. She has also appeared in numerous anthologies concerning natural history. Zwinger is currently a professor at Colorado College.

Zwinger has had a significant role in maintaining the well-being of the environment in the Western states. She is member emeritus of the Colorado Nature Conservancy and currently serves as a director of The Orion Society and the John Burroughs Association. A naturalist history consultant on the Green, San Juan, and Colorado Rivers, she lectures and tours extensively to promote environmental awareness. During her lifetime she has collaborated with several other naturalist authors, including Edwin Way Teale, and her own daughter, Susan.

Though Zwinger's writings primarily concern the western United States, she has also written about her childhood home. In Run, River, Run, a brief statement compares the mighty Green River in Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah to the White River. In The Near Sighted Naturalist, she has an essay entitled "Remembering Indiana," in which she relates experiences from her childhood home to her experiences now as an adult in the West. In it, she states that Indiana is crucial to her nature writings about the Rocky Mountains and the western landscape.

After I moved to the Rocky Mountains and began to write about a western landscape that enticed and enchanted me as an adult, I called upon the memories of my youth that were imbedded in the back of my mind.... I came to a western landscape as an outsider looking in; I could do so because in Indiana I had learned how to be an insider looking out. (5-6)

The fact that she grew up with the richness of the Indiana landscape helps her see with clarity the natural wealth of the West. Her familiarity with Indiana landscapes, from the tranquility of the White River in

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Muncie to the rolling hills of Bloomington, has allowed her to appreciate the uniqueness of the West. She states that Indiana has become the basis for comparison in her writings on the West.

Indiana has become my “type location,” as a geologist would say, for judging and evaluating the rest of my world. The West is the West because of what I remember about Indiana. Its rolling hills and tranquil farms are the contrast to the crags of Pikes Peak, which I see out of my front door every morning. (6)

Zwinger also explains that childhood experience is key to many Hoosier authors, as children need a sense of stability and Indiana offers just that. She writes of her own childhood, as well as Edwin Way Teale’s.

Although we had gone in opposite directions--[Teale] east and I west--we agreed not only that Indiana was a good place to grow up, but that an essential quality necessary for nature writing was fostered there, as well as a wonderful optimism that we both shared. (5)

Zwinger considers herself a naturalist, but explains that this is different from being an environmentalist. She does not “try to persuade people into action toward the environment” but she instead “communicates to people the beauty of nature. We give you a lollipop, then we convert you.” According to Zwinger, being a naturalist writer is “getting someone to look at [nature] and question it. Curiosity is key, as is an interest in the world.”

--SDJ

Sources:

“Zwinger, Ann.” Contemporary Authors. 2002.

Zwinger, Ann. The Near Sighted Naturalist. Tucson: U. of Arizona P., 1998.

---. Run, River, Run. Tucson: U. of Arizona P., 1975.

Image:

Promotional photo courtesy of Ann Zwinger.

Links:

The Orion Society