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Home: Chronicle of a North Country Life

by Beth Powning



Goose Lane Editions, 2014. ISBN 978-0-864-92852-8.

Reviewed by Mary Ann Moore

Posted on 11/07/2014

Review of the Month, November 2014 

Nonfiction: Memoir; Nonfiction: Faith/Spirituality/Inspiration; Nonfiction: Nature/Place/Environment



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On a cool fall day on Canada's west coast, hearing the honking of Canada geese, I read of Beth Powning's "dream of the wild" on Canada's east coast. She also dreamed of the garden as she and her husband Peter Powning "imagined a life" and set out for New Brunswick, Canada from New England in the United States in 1972. They still live in New Brunswick on the farm they brought in the spring of 1970. In her introduction to this new edition, Powning recalls handwriting the words that begin her book: "The coyotes are newcomers."

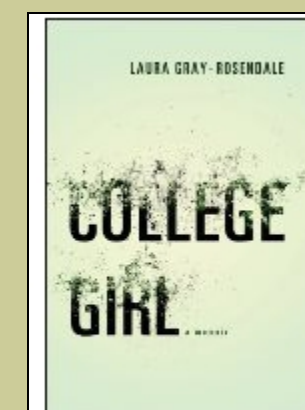
You would think a writer improves with practice (and we do) but here is Beth Powning almost twenty years ago writing with lyricism, honesty and originality. Having read Powning's other books, I can see the beginnings of them here. At night, lying in bed, she feels as if she's "in the cabin of a ship; the hills and fields rise around me like dark seas and I feel secure . . ." Those thoughts could have been her first gleanings about *The Sea Captain's Wife*, a novel published in 2010.

In a review of *Edge Seasons*, Powning's memoir published in 2005, poet and memoirist Patrick Lane said: "There are few writers who can evoke the wild world with such intensity and originality." The same can be said of this book written before *Edge Seasons* (and another memoir called *Shadow Child: An Apprenticeship in Love and Loss*). She refers to those edges or "space between" in *Home*. "All day long, I felt a peculiar passivity; in the space between the end of one era, and the start of another." And when Powning plants a vegetable garden she finds "a stage between vision and truth, when I suddenly doubt my faith."

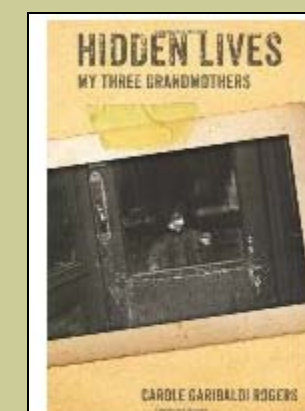
Powning's full-color photographs accompany the prose and our walk with the author. It was Powning's camera ("microscope, wand, sacred text") that helped her to look at her world "in reverence and wonder." It was photography that brought her back to writing after her literary agent's letters "became boozily incoherent." The photographs are exquisite close-ups of the details of plants and meditative images of the landscape and the sky. Nature was no longer separate. Powning had found her subject in the grass and the spring's birdsong and found she was where she belonged.

"It takes a long time for roots to grow," Beth Powning says. It took twenty years for

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her to realize "this place" as home. It became so through the small events of the natural world" that offered comfort "with a kind of transcendent familiarity, an ancient re-awakening."

If there's a difference between prose and poetry, I couldn't find it here. Powning felt exposed under "so much sky" and dreamed of what could be planted on the farm. "I needed to frame the sky before I could love its serenity."

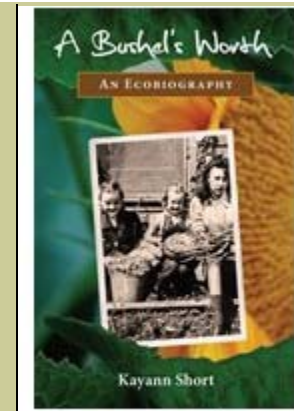
Beth Powning decided she would be an author when she was eight years old. How fortunate we are that she did. As for "home," you have to "weave it, thread by thread."

Read an excerpt from this book.

Beth Powning has published books of photography as well as two works of non-fiction, *Shadow Child* and *Edge Seasons*, and two bestselling novels, *The Hatbox Letters* and *The Sea Captain's Wife*. She grew up in a small New England town and since 1972 has lived with her husband Peter Powning on an 1870s farm in New Brunswick, Canada where they established a pottery business. Visit [her website](#).






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