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Hannah and the Mountain: Notes toward a Wilderness Fatherhood (American Lives)

Jonathan Johnson

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HANNAH —————
————— and the Mountain
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*Notes toward
a Wilderness Fatherhood*
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Jonathan Johnson
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American Lives Series • Tobias Wolff, Editor

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Jonathan Johnson : Hannah and the Mountain: Notes toward a Wilderness Fatherhood (American Lives)
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hannah and the Mountain: Notes toward a Wilderness Fatherhood (American Lives):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A tough story to share yet written and shared with great honesty. A book I'll share but not one ...By John M.Well done and done well. A tough story to share yet written and shared with great honesty. A book I'll share but not one I'll give away.3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Jonathan

Johnson: upinmichigan.org review
By upinmichigan.org
Jonathan Johnson, Hannah and the Mountain reviewed by Jacob Powers
It is difficult to find a text that gives balance between nature and family. Granted, each genre holds its own, but to find a book that discusses both the love of the wilderness and the love of family is rare. Fortunately Jonathan Johnson, with his memoir *Hannah and the Mountain*, has successfully done just that. Johnson's narrative at first focuses on his goal to renovate a cabin owned by his extended family for over forty years for him and his wife, Amy, in the Idaho wilderness: "[We] came to the mountains because our adult lives were rushing toward us and we wanted to go out and meet those lives in a place that would keep us young and free and filled with passion. After years of school we were ready to settle into the long story of home." This feeling of home quickly takes a step forward when Jonathan and Amy discover that she is pregnant with their first child. Now, with the combination of extensive renovations and the limited amounts of resources to do so, the intent to form a home suitable to raise his future child in quickly takes off. Yet Johnson does it all in hope—hope that his firstborn will experience the beauty and awe of the wilderness that he and his wife adore. Tragedy, however, ensues as the memoir (which reads a lot like a novel) quickly disintegrates from its optimistic dreams into the harsh realities of a complicated pregnancy. The baby is carried too low, putting pressure on and stretching the lower uterus, threatening a premature birth: "Amy'd been having pains low in her abdomen all along...the hope was that the pains were the result of these problems, not the contractions that could be causing the problems." Yet all hope is not lost as Johnson guides the reader through his and his wife's pains and grief towards a strong anticipation that they will be able to tame their dreams again: "We've got our little cabin on land I've come to think of as an extension of my own body...that will be more than enough for Amy and me to build a life on. I will not create sorrows in a life where sorrows find me on their own." While most of the themes and settings in the book take place Idaho, many are reflective of Michigan's landscape as well. Johnson writes of Marquette where both he and Amy grew up several times throughout. There are also moments where he and his wife consider where they would rather have the baby—in their own formed home in the Idaho wilderness, or back in Marquette where their parents and past lives are. But what stands out the most is Johnson's connection with a past friend and writer, Mac, who experiences the death of his sixteen year old son when he died in an accident on the icy roads just outside of Marquette. It is in this moment of the book where Johnson connects his own experiences of a possible future father with the tragic loss that Mac experiences: "Odds are that being a father will forever be like walking on the thick crust on top of four feet of snow in the cold, February sunlight." As the memoir progresses, it becomes apparent that the love and fear of family cannot simply be contained within the borders of our own state or within Johnson's past life. Michigan may be where Johnson grew up, but Idaho is where his home and life is now. Although the story is one that has been heard before, it is Johnson's heavy experience in the poetic realm and ability to capture emotions of joy and distress that makes *Hannah and the Mountain* stand out amongst others. With an interwoven reflection between the lyrical love of the wilderness with the preferable avoidance of the busy city life, Johnson paints a landscape that is powerful and unforgettable. Yet what lies in the foreground of Johnson's affection of the wilderness is that irreplaceable love and desire he has for family itself—"If any of us are ever saved, whatever that might mean, we aren't saved by the stories we create for ourselves to inhabit; we are saved by our loves." For Johnson, it is the family that makes the life; the rest is replaceable. ___
Jacob Powers is a senior at Grand Valley State University, graduating in the winter of 2006 with a degree in Creative Writing and a minor in English. After graduating, he plans to take a year off and then apply to graduate programs.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The evocative prose of a poet
By Verum
Jonathan Johnston writes with the evocative prose of a poet. He tells the story of his path toward fatherhood and toward the fulfillment of his childhood dream of building his family's cabin home in the mountains of Idaho. He does so with passion and care. The reader sees clearly the autumn twilight as it fills the fields and sees the full moonlight come spilling through the windows of the cabin. On these beautifully written pages the reader learns of the profound love Jonathan and his wife Amy share. It is a book I shall love giving so others might come to know this incredible author.

Longing for a home in big, wild country that would keep them passionate and young, Jonathan Johnson and his wife, Amy, set out to build a log cabin on his family's land in a remote and beautiful corner of Idaho. But what began as a doable dream for the two of them suddenly looks quite different when, on their first morning in the cabin—without electricity, a telephone, running water, or real windows—the couple learn that Amy is pregnant.

From Publishers Weekly
A couple seeks life's deeper meaning in a return to the land—a place that would keep us young and free and filled with passion—and faces both hardship and joy. It's a familiar American story these days, but Johnson tells it with compassion and grace, focusing in particular on his wife Amy's pregnancy and their preparations to bring a baby into their wilderness world. Amy and the author must refurbish their cabin, which is situated on his family's Idaho land; they worry about money; they debate about where Amy will give birth. But the narrative takes a wrenching turn when they learn that Amy is unlikely to carry the fetus to term. The desperate measures the author once took to save a winter-born calf poignantly resonate with the couple's ultimately futile attempts to bring their baby, Hannah, to term. A later pregnancy ends in miscarriage. These sorrows can make for grim material, and readers

expecting lots of lovely nature writing will be disappointed, but Johnson is an elegant, emotive narrator; as the couple's story of healing progresses, one will sense that happiness (and a baby) will find these two eventually. (Mar.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist One wonders that such a deeply personal, private story about becoming a father could ever be written. Yet teacher, poet, and fiction writer (Mastodon: 80% Complete, 2001) Johnson seems to need to relive the joys and pains of his experience with wife Amy in Idaho. Young and underemployed, the couple decide to finish an Idaho log cabin and live and work there, because they "wanted to go out and meet those lives in a place that would keep [them] young and free and filled with passion." The going gets rough; money and real jobs are scarce. Amy becomes the major breadwinner and, once pregnant, is confined to bed rest because of physical issues. Sadly, Hannah is stillborn, as is a second child. Along the way, the couple's trials are buoyed by the events of nature, the essential goodness of humanity, and their mutual love. Elegant writing and sharp dialogue mark this bittersweet account. Alan Moores Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "Elegant writing and sharp dialogue mark this bittersweet account." Booklist