

Gifts from the Mountain

Simple Truths for Life's Complexities



EILEEN MCDARGH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RODERICK MACIVER

An Excerpt From

***Gifts from the Mountain:
Simple Truths for Life's Complexities***

by Eileen McDargh
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Foreword

As a National Geographic photographer, I've worked for years to train my eyes and senses so I can capture moments of beauty and significance on film. What I do with a camera, Eileen has done with her words.

This is a book of rare wisdom and relevance. Having spent much of my life in wilderness, I know the quiet, deep teachings of nature. I also know it can take time and effort to find them. How marvelous that Eileen takes us on a trek with her, sharing the lessons she has found so that we can apply them in all parts of our life. Relax—you don't have to leave your chair.

Photographer John Muir insisted that we must “climb the mountains and get their glad tidings.” Eileen hears all those “tidings” loud and clear and tells them in elegant language that can help us uncover ways to make our lives better, deeper, and richer.

Gifts from the Mountain captures the essence of what my camera lens finds—a banquet of wisdom for those who would listen and learn!

What a gift.

Dewitt Jones, Award-winning National Geographic photographer,
author, and acclaimed professional speaker



Come join my journey
and get ready for yours.

Eileen

Prologue

Gifts from the Mountain Simple Truths for Life's Complexities

Years ago, my ideal vacation would have been found pool-side: comfort at my beck and call, hot showers, cold drinks, a suitcase filled with resort wear, and stacks of books on hand to read.

Hah! The fates had not warned me that I would fall in love with a man who would stick his nose in the calendar in January, point to a two-week time frame in mid-summer, confirm the phase of the moon (waxing) and announce his intent to apply for a wilderness permit. In my naiveté, “wilderness” meant back roads, drive-in restaurants, or getting lost and having to ask directions. But to Bill it was the vast 150 million year-old Sierra Nevada range running down the spine of California.

And so we went. Again and again.

In the course of our double-digit marriage, I've done my best to hang in there. Little would my clients and audiences guess this high-heeled speaker in corporate attire could emerge from Sierra Mountain passes, alpine meadows, ice fields, horrific storms, and below freezing temperatures with two weeks worth of grime, assorted cuts, bruises and bites, matted hair, swollen eyelids (altitude and sun always do it to me), and a strange mixture of unabashed relief and pride.

And then the inevitable happened. The children left home. This was the summer Bill and I would make our first ever twosome ascent into the Sierras.

No problem...except for the fact that with at least three people, the weight of equipment can be equally shared. No problem...except that I'm small and my backpack limit is about 35-40 pounds, but this time I'll need to carry more.

As we struggled over boulder-strewn fields, trudged up unmarked mountain passes at 12,000 plus feet, sidestepped across ice fields, watched 65 mph winds pick up a tent and soar it across granite towers, guzzled our last drop of water, praying we'd last until Coldwater Creek, I figured there HAD to be a reason behind this most difficult of trips. Perhaps this backpacking trek was in my life for a purpose.

So I began to pay attention, to see and hear with new eyes and ears. Surely this mountain had lessons to teach me, to force me to slow down and learn more by noticing more.

Who would ever have thought there'd be gifts in grime, grit, and grace-filled mornings? I found lessons for business, for relationships, for family, for life, and for my soul. It is my hope these lessons find a home in your world as well.

Life is complicated and complex. We yearn for simple answers and want them in sound bites, in small passages potent in message and meaning. This book seeks to answer that need. In many ways, it will remind you of what you already know but have forgotten in the tension of time constraints, work worries, and family

frustrations. Some passages will jar your memory while others might evoke a new awareness and result in action.

You, too, have your own mountain. There's always a challenge that demands your attention or a complication looking for simplification. Whether your complex world is the boardroom or bedroom, there are insights for the taking. May I invite you to read while thinking of the places we all trek on a daily basis: those places where we climb the corporate ladder, scale the next problem, surmount the competition; those places where we forge streams filled with relationships and pack bags crammed with "stuff"; those places where we think our journey belongs only to ourselves and cast blind eye and deaf ear to the other people along our trails; and lastly, those places which refresh and renew us for the next climb, the next assault, the next mountain.

Open to any page. You don't have to read in sequential order. Ask yourself how a simple truth can be extended as a tool in your life. If you so choose, pose the statement to your work team, to your family, to your organization. Listen. Their responses might turn a mountain into a molehill.

Come take a hike and discover your own footnotes for walking through life. There is so much wisdom, hidden in plain view. Pause, look with new eyes, and discover simple truths that can unravel and make sense of many of life's complexities.



Climb the mountains and get their good tidings.

Nature's peace will flow into you
as sunshine flows into trees.

The winds will blow their own freshness into you
and the storms their energy
while cares will drop from you
like the leaves before Autumn.

—John Muir



Steady strides
beat hasty starts.

Backpacks have to settle.

You adjust here, tighten there, shift weight down,
shift weight up. It's a trial and error method as all
the while you maintain a steady, even pace.

No speed. Just walking, feeling, assessing.

Recall getting a new job, working for a new manager,
becoming a parent, or starting a relationship.

Too often mistakes are made at the outset because
we did not take time to walk steady, to feel, to assess,
to adjust here, to tighten there and loosen here.

Ignore the small pains, the momentary twinges
at your peril. They get bigger over time.

Honest adjustments are easiest in the beginning.

Pay attention. Easy does it.



Acclimate at a higher level
before you begin the next part
of the climb.

We're not only creatures of habit, but our physical bodies attempt to adjust to altitude and temperature. Even driving to a higher elevation can bring dull headaches and stomach discomfort. Add strenuous exercise to the mix and you can get an unpleasant case of altitude sickness. Go slow, drink water, stay at the new level and listen to your body. See how it feels. Sometimes bodies don't adjust and you're smart to head back down.

Have you ever aspired to go "higher" in life and then, after you worked so hard to achieve it, found that it did not sit well? Before you buy the bigger house, go for the advancement, seek the huge new client, mentally try it on. Better still, see if you can "sample the altitude". You can spend time in another department, maybe even shadow the president to see if you're a fit for that role. Before you buy the larger house, walk the neighborhood, talk to the neighbors. Try it on. Ask the huge client for a project assignment and learn what it will take from you AND from them.

If it feels right, go forward. If not, there's wisdom in turning around or staying where you are.



Switchbacks are necessary
to reach the top.

Mountain switchbacks—those S-shaped trails that bring a backpacker slowly to the pass—can be wearisome.

Dust rises and walking far right to turn around and trudge far left seems long and tedious.

Surely scrambling hand-over-hand is quicker.

Maybe yes. But more often it's dangerous and can land you in a place where you cannot move. Shortcuts do not often produce the result you expect.

There's a price to pay for not working the plan and planning the work. We don't have to jump to "the top" now. Earn it: effort repeated, over and over.



Pack out your garbage.

And while you're at it, don't forget the garbage you might be tempted to leave when you pack out of a job, a marriage, a relationship, a neighborhood.

Don't leave behind hurtful words, discounted colleagues, spiteful after-the-fact stories, trashed property or people.

Leave well. Someone will enter the spot you have left.

May there be no garbage left behind. Besides, who knows? You might return someday.

this material has been excerpted from

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