



Running on Red Dog Road: And Other Perils of an Appalachian Childhood

Drema Hall Berkheimer

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“Mining companies piled trash coal in a slag heap and set it ablaze. The coal burned up, but the slate didn’t. The heat turned it rose and orange and lavender. The dirt road I lived on was paved with that sharp-edged rock. We called it red dog. Grandma told me, Don’t you go running on that red dog road. But I do.”

Gypsies, faith-healers, moonshiners, and snake handlers weave through Drema’s childhood in 1940s Appalachia after her father is killed in the coal mines, her mother goes off to work as a Rosie the Riveter, and she is left in the care of devout Pentecostal grandparents. What follows is a spitfire of a memoir that reads like a novel with intrigue, sweeping emotion, and indisputable charm. Drema’s coming of age is colored by tent revivals with Grandpa, poetry-writing hobos, and traveling carnivals, and through it all, she serves witness to a multi-generational family of saints and sinners whose lives defy the stereotypes. Just as she defies her own.

Running On Red Dog Road is proof that truth is stranger than fiction, especially when it comes to life and faith in an Appalachian childhood.

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