



The Buffalo, Ben, and Me

Todd Parnell

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The Buffalo River in northwest Arkansas is one of the longest free-flowing, undammed rivers west of the Mississippi—and one of the most beautiful waterways on earth. Almost lost to development, it proved to be the perfect testing ground for a young boy almost lost to mediocrity.

Middle-schooler Ben is struggling with learning challenges that have left him resentful and underachieving. His father, middle-ager Todd, wants to help his son gain self-confidence but is searching for his own identity. For twelve adventure-filled days on the river—all 125 miles of her navigable course, from Ponca to the White River—father and son discover the formative, curative, and redemptive powers of nature.

Leaving video games and cell phones behind isn't easy for kids these days, but in the great outdoors parents and youngsters can connect in unimaginable ways. *The Buffalo, Ben, and Me* shares such a connection in an adventure story set on a wild river. It is a captivating tale featuring a host of colorful characters and enlivened by photos that reflect the essence of the wilderness.

But deeper than that, it is the story of crossing a threshold from dream to possibility—of one man's search for meaning in his life and his efforts to motivate his son, blending love of family with love of nature in a tale of transformation. It tells how a rebellious teen and a bored banker conspired to buck a system keyed to predictability, and how a wild river inspired both to a better use of their lives. "This trip hit me as hard as it did Ben," writes Parnell, "as a wake-up call to life, to what is important, to what is not."

The trip down the Buffalo was one that even Ben admits changed his life in more ways than one, as he later went on to earn a master of science degree specializing in stream ecology. For any reader who loves the outdoors—and especially those seeking to connect with their children—*The Buffalo, Ben, and Me* is essential reading that reminds us of possibilities to be had in facing life head-on as it raises awareness of the need to protect the Ozarks' water resources and heritage.

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