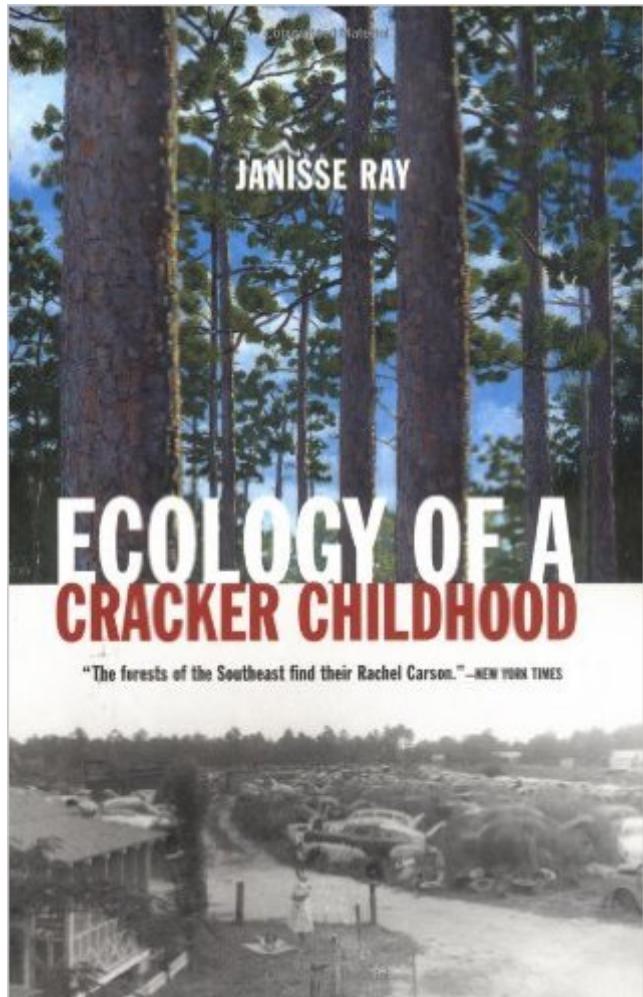


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Ecology Of A Cracker Childhood (The World As Home)



Synopsis

Janisse Ray grew up in a junkyard along U.S. Highway 1, hidden from Florida-bound vacationers by the hedge at the edge of the road and by hulks of old cars and stacks of blown-out tires. Ecology of a Cracker Childhood tells how a childhood spent in rural isolation and steeped in religious fundamentalism grew into a passion to save the almost vanished longleaf pine ecosystem that once covered the South. In language at once colloquial, elegiac, and informative, Ray redeems two Souths. "Suffused with the same history-haunted sense of loss that imprints so much of the South and its literature. What sets Ecology of a Cracker Childhood apart is the ambitious and arresting mission implied in its title. . . . Heartfelt and refreshing." - The New York Times Book Review.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

this book is a must for any Southerner and for anyone interested in the environment. Though I was born and raised in Georgia I was ignorant of the ecology of the longleaf pine forests. And though I have often drive through the region described in the book I knew nothing about the people there. The book alternates between a memoir of Ray's family and upbringing and lyrical descriptions of the land in which they lived. She also tells the story of the magnificent pine forests which grew from Virginia to Mississippi and which are almost nonexistent today. There are many books today about "my childhood" but this is far superior to any I have read with the exception of Mary Karr's "The Liar's Club." It will be of interest to environmentalists and lovers of good writing alike.

Ooooooooo-eeee. I cannot tell you the number of times you will pause while reading this extraordinarily sensitive and profoundly moving life-story. Some of your pauses will feature your face wreathed in smiles, for Janisse Ray's "Ecology of a Cracker Childhood" is a celebration of both place and family, and her finely-delineated family sketches and gloriously-rendered anecdotes and teeming with respect and affection for her family. Other pauses will find you, I am sure, hands on knees, weeping. For there is great pain in this book as well...the pain of a place that is gradually disappearing, the pain of understanding your place in that place, the pain of coming to grips with the flaws of your heritage. One reviewer, Wes Jackson, said, "Janisse Ray is a role model for countless future rural writers to come." I believe that he understates Ms. Ray's importance. To tell the truth, she is a role model, plain and simple. It is my hope that this stirring memoir will vault her into our nation's consciousness and conscience. This daughter of a Cracker junkyard owner has a significant message to tell us, and her language is simply remarkable. Her verbal imagery is astounding; her precise descriptions -- of humans, flora and fauna -- are models of elegance. I am willing to bet that there are more than a few readers who could only imagine the possible union of Ms. Ray and Rick Bragg ("All Over but the Shoutin'"). These two white Southerners have much to teach us about family, conscience, commitments and reverence of place. "Ecology of a Cracker Childhood" will emerge as one of our century's most important works. Be glad to have read it when it first came out.

Ms. Ray presents a refreshing approach to a "growing up" memoir that is simultaneously heart-tugging, entertaining and convicting. All of our personal and family histories are closely linked to the natural history of some place. Ms. Ray gives us a wonderful reminder of that through the interweaving of her personal experiences and the history of the long leaf pine ecosystem. She also tells us just how tragic it is that so much of what should be the current part of that "history" is lost or about to be. Ms. Ray helps us experience the joys and the heartbreaks of her own family, and the dangers and adventures of a junkyard. The uncommon combination of what on the surface might seem to be diverse topics could have come across as disjunct had they not been so wonderfully melded. This book is a renewing flame for the mind and the heart.

It is difficult to capture the everyday incidents of a life and intersperse them into a broader view of world thought, but Ms. Ray has accomplished this. She has presented an accurate picture of a lifestyle in America, in a segment of society often mis-understood and neglected, if not resented by a fast and hedonistic society. Her ability to weave the memoirs of a simple life into a broader

world-view. I am impressed with her style, her easy ability to make us see inside her viewpoints, and the reflection that her book has brought to me about a life that is quickly passing us by.

I originally read Janisse Ray's memoirs and essay collection, "Ecology of a Cracker Childhood", for a class in college. To be honest, I hated it at first and told two of my classmates that if Janisse was so conscious of the environment, then why had the trees died to print this book. I ate those words before I was half way through. Janisse Ray has an immaculate voice and breathtaking experiences to share with us about her childhood, spent living with her family in a junkyard. The book alternates each chapter between memoirs and essays on the natural forests of Georgia. My preference was on Ray's childhood - where she describes in rich detail about the family bonds that arise out of poverty. There is a certain mystical fantasy about her childhood playgrounds, as she talks about being in a family with money problems and numerous mouths to feed. Ray exposes the dark sides of her father's religious fanaticism and mental instability. These stories are honest and refrain from sentimentality. Ray tells talks about her life with simple facts and observations. We experience with her a full view of her introducing a college boyfriend to the wreckage that has been transformed into a home. "Ecology of a Crack Childhood" is a powerful read that everyone should have the opportunity to experience. I, myself, have spent most of my life growing up in cities, but at least now I have a taste of what the rural world has to offer.

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