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Body Geographic

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A memoir from the award-winning author of *My Lesbian Husband*, Barrie Jean Borich's *Body Geographic* turns personal history into an inspired reflection on the points where place and person intersect, where running away meets running toward, and where dislocation means finding oneself.

One coordinate of Borich's story is Chicago, the prototypical Great Lakes port city built by immigrants like her great-grandfather Big Petar, and the other is her own port of immigration, Minneapolis, the combined skylines of these two cities tattooed on Borich's own back. Between Chicago and Minneapolis Borich maps her own Midwest, a true heartland in which she measures the distance between the dreams and realities of her own life, her family's, and her fellow travelers' in the endless American migration.

Covering rough terrain---from the hardships of her immigrant ancestors to the travails of her often-drunk young self, longing to be madly awake in the world, from the changing demographics of midwestern cities to the personal transformations of coming out and living as a lesbian---*Body Geographic* is cartography of high literary order, plotting routes, real and imagined, and putting an alternate landscape on the map.

Body Geographic Details

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Author : Barrie Jean Borich

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From Reader Review Body Geographic for online ebook

Elizabeth says

Could not finish

Rambling Reader says

lyrical

Julene says

Exquisite writing! Poetic and engaging. I did not think I would be interested in a memoir about maps set in the Midwest (Chicago & Minneapolis), but once I started reading I was hooked by her eloquence. Each chapter unfolded in a way that was integrated and beautiful about the immigration of her family, and mapping geography through the female body.

I loved her essay in Wave-Form so plan to read all her books. Oddly enough, I already had her books checked 'Want to Read' in Goodreads! Also, I recently read a review out about her new book, "Apocalypse, Darling."

Some quotes:

"Historians say the story of the world is a roll call of migrations..."

"Longing has a way of moving the body forward, that lean toward, that palpitating chest ache, desire a wheel."

Her wife Linnea says: "When we fear something we don't hear what's really there, but rather what we imagine."

In the section: Point of Destination: Such a City, she reflects on her brief eye connection with Lauren Hutton, who she was obsessed with when an adolescent:

"When the object of a long-held gaze catches your eye, gazes back, the gaze returned becomes a loop, a refrain, less migration than a circular route, no longer a progression toward but instead a meditation of the being. I will never again be the lean young woman with the camera, and neither will Lauren Hutton. And so we meet. In this corner."

"American youth is for wandering dim-lit streets, for reaching up to a stage, a dollar bill gripped between the knuckles, homage to a dance of gender and sex, to the certainty that anything is possible."

"Water pulls the body forward. Water hems the body in. Nothing feeds longing like uncertainty, and nothing is more uncertain than a horizon line where the wide haze of water swallows the hard border of sky." The beginning of the chapter where her and her wife travel to New Orleans for her parent's fiftieth wedding anniversary. It is in the aftermath of Katrina and we see the city so fully through their eyes.

There are sections that are italicized in the book, even more poetic, here is one:

"Underneath are maps that are torn away or stored elsewhere, maps of usual stories, of sobering up, of marrying, of calling a marriage a marriage, calling a queer marriage just a marriage, a newer version of marriage made of both staying married and questioning the nature of marriage, that is both progressing and

staying in place on a map of twenty years of some sickness, some health, on the south side of some city that keeps changing."

"Underneath are so many incomplete maps of a Chicagoland childhood and adolescence, all the illegible moments and unmappable people who made and remade us, and the maps that made or remade their maps."

Her wife gets a brain tumor, "The MRI of Linnea's brain looked like a map, a flat scan of what's really a globular mass. Impressions that look like roadways or the tributaries of rivers, marking the folds in the tissues, the tumor a round section where the color changed, from smoky white to gray. If her brain scan were a highway map her tumor would appear to be a city, a dead metropolis, soon to be detonated, remade into open space, ready for either regret or development."

She survives. But, "In the letter Linnea left she'd written me free. Love well, she wrote. Love widely. Did she know what I'd already conjured? The new lover and I on a stone bridge of some downtown, the city rising behind us like a pearl curtain, gaunt thighs and hard arms holding me from behind, woman or man or some body inbetween. I don't know what kind I would love or even fuck after twenty years faithful to Linnea, so I pictured all kinds, full-breasted and flat, maybe fingers, maybe phallus, likely silicone, possibly flesh. The betrayal is not that I thought of other bodies but that some moments, tired of waiting, I even hoped for them, not parked loss but the open map, another beginning, unmediated blue."

"The commonness of mortality may be its most excruciating beauty."

Also here is much to learn about maps, such as the phrase "Here Be Monsters" which was attributed to medieval cartographers. Open sea areas in their maps contained monsters. The book is filled with maps, with reference material for each one in the back.

A potent book to read today when immigrants are under threat and attack. Now we have gay marriage, back when she got married to a woman we did not. In this book we are witness to long term love, and see the gay community integrated into our landscape.

Full Stop says

<http://www.full-stop.net/2013/03/25/r...>

Review by Teow Lim Goh

Barrie Jean Borich writes, "Maps are made of more than facts, are histories of what we believed, loved, feared, as well as who we are." A number of books in recent years explore this imaginative terrain of maps. Peter Turchi's *Maps of the Imagination* examines the map as a metaphor for story and likens the work of a writer to that of a cartographer. Rebecca Solnit's *Infinite City* is an atlas of the San Francisco Bay Area, from the locations of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* to the lost industrial city and the sites of modern conservative power. In *Atlas of Remote Islands*, Judith Schalansky chronicles the lore of fifty distant islands, none of which she has actually visited. As in these books, in *Body Geographic*, Borich engages in the practice of literary mapmaking. She uses the map as a construct to examine her family history and her own life, and in doing so, creates an atlas of the dislocations and longings that drive American migration.

The Midwest is Borich's landscape. She has the skylines of Chicago, where she was born, and Minneapolis,

where she now lives, tattooed on her lower back. Even though it is not the most intimate part of her body, the pain is excruciating when the artist inks her skin. The Amtrak she rides between the two cities is called the Empire Builder for a Saint Paul railroad magnate; the line, which extends to the Puget Sound, was a part of the frenzy of the western expansion. The tallgrass Midwestern prairies were a void to dominate between the power centers of the East and the mineral wealth of the West. She grew up in the steel mill suburbs of Chicago's South Side, where her great-grandparents arrived from Croatia; they had landed on Ellis Island just before America imposed strict quotas on newcomers from Southern and Eastern Europe. The South Side is now a landscape of ruin: only shells of former factories remain.

Read more here: <http://www.full-stop.net/2013/03/25/r...>

Sarah says

I've loved Barrie Jean Borich's writing since I first read *My Lesbian Husband* years and years ago. This book is wonderful in many ways -- I'm savoring in particular how she writes about mid life. Wonderful.

Rachael says

Body Geographic by Barrie Jean Borich is a sensual delight, an earthy contemplation of the relationship of place to body. Our bodies are maps—where past and current lovers have tread, the scars that hold narratives, both secret and not secret.

Borich incorporates the stories of her great-grandparents, her grandparents, her parents, and herself, where they all have journeyed and how that made them into the people they are. She takes us to Croatia, California, Florida, New Orleans, but lingering most on Minneapolis, where she's spent 25 years, and her beloved Chicago, where she was born and raised.

Borich is a respected creative nonfiction teacher and essayist, and the chapters in *Body Geographic* are essays in the true sense of the word. Essay is actually a verb—to essay is to try or attempt, to explore. Borich explores ideas through her writing and her writing is a journey. At the beginning of a chapter it was as if I got into a car with no idea of where I was headed, but I ended up in the most beautiful overlooks and alleys until returning safely back to where I had started. She's a master at the braided essay, taking two or three seemingly separate ideas but weaving them masterfully into one piece. For example, in the chapter "Navigating Jazz," we get a contemplation of jazz music circa 1950s, wide-ranging descriptions of singer Miss Nancy Wilson, and a grandmother who may be suffering from Sundowner's Syndrome, a form of dementia. At the surface it doesn't seem to relate together, but Borich deftly combines all elements. As a writer who wants to work more in the essay form, I plan to use all of these chapters as models and cannot wait to return to them and study them more carefully.

This is a highly original memoir, perfect reading for someone who is tired of the ordinary. Borich has created "insets" and "TripTiks" and "points of departure," categories one would see on a map. I enjoyed the inclusion of photos, a collection of old-world maps and landmarks. For readers familiar with Chicago or Minneapolis, the book will particularly resonate.

This is a book in which you will want to linger upon the words just as you would linger upon a body you

love and don't want to leave.

willowdog says

Creative, non-linear narrative tracing the real, imagined, future, and past maps of families, cities, and lovers which intersect in Borich's life. A wonderful read.

Alex Clark says

Very interesting glimpse into queer culture and how it's changed over the years. Though I appreciated the changing voices and styles, this was sometimes distracting, and there were parts where it could've been reined in a bit. Overall, I would definitely recommend and plan on reading again.

Patricia Murphy says

Creative non-linear structure. Innovative use of image. Some very strong lyric writing here.

Jen Hirt says

A unique memoir that comes to awareness through maps, maps, maps and every metaphor associated with maps. There are no chapters, only "Map 1," "Map 2," with a couple brilliant "TripTiks" (play on triptych), a "Legend," etc. There are fascinating black and white prints of odd maps and photographs of Chicago's post-industrial landscape that have helped Borich understand her relationship to women (and, occasionally, men), to her family, to the 1970s and the 1980s and beyond, to Chicago, and to Minneapolis. She explains early on in the book (and early on in her adulthood) that "When I said my face was a map, I was beginning to discern what I'd decided to make of myself, mapping as the act of making out some new and more accurate self that I hadn't made out before" (5). Doing all that creative nonfiction should do, this memoir is less about a sequence of exciting events and very much about the author's deeply introspective thought process as she re-examines her life. And this is a memoir that is meant to be looked at and browsed out of order as much as it is to be read front to back. I found myself flipping around to all the maps (each with a succinct and brilliant caption) and thinking a lot about how Borich's clever overlay of map terms was a perfect way to organize the book.

Judith Shadford says

I shift between astonishing and brilliant for this incredible memoir. Barrie and I were in the same graduating class at Rainier Writing Workshop, so I heard bits and pieces of it in various workshops. But as I started reading, I wondered if ultimately, the linking of body and geography might be forced and artificial.

No.

And that's the genius of the book. Barrie changed my mind--opened windows and doors I didn't know were there--on how to understand physical geography and family migrations, how to steer one's own narrative away from the desperately awful "...and then we moved to...and I had the worst hamburger...and he really hurt my feelings." Images of the Rat Factory and Blue City and the corn fields live in my mind long after the book's been shelved. I too have those kind of never-dimming scenes, but because Barrie has taught me another way of seeing...well, I guess I've become a teeny bit a more integrated.

Thanks, Barrie--

Sivananthi T says

Memoir using the metaphors of journeys in life, between cities, between generations, between times, between stages/states in life including journey of sexuality.

Colleen Newquist says

Interesting, cerebral memoir/reflection about the landscape of relationships. A little too intellectual and distant for me--I would prefer more of the emotion that's finally introduced toward the end.

Laura says

Fascinating!

Jessica says

Barrie's concept of writing as focused on geography and physicality is interesting and solid. The narrative still comes through, but feels exploratory and focused, rather than inaccessible or forced. My favorite sections were about Minneapolis, her niece in Cali and Linnea's tumor.
