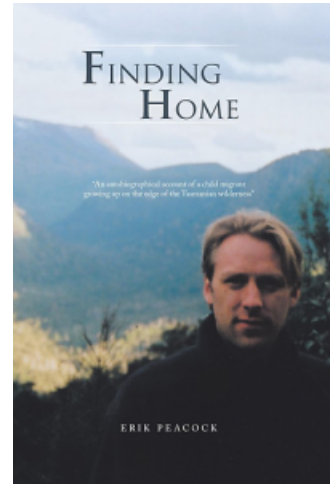


Review: Finding Home

My response to reading an autobiography is a binary condition – the book is either tedious or don't-want-to-put-it-down fascinating. It is the latter condition that results from a read of *Finding Home*, the autobiography of the Gen-Xer Tasmanian Christian Environmentalist Activist, Erik Peacock.



My fascination was not simply due to the fact that I know Erik personally: a bit more than simply a mere acquaintance, a friend of a friend and occasional conversationist. I know some of those he talks about. I remember many of the environmental and political issues he refers to. Sometimes it was a surprise ("that was him doing that?!?") and other times it was nostalgic. He writes

...I found myself lounging on the back of a flatbed truck full of woodchips with a smelly hippy doing blocks of the Hobart CBD. We both had suits on and life sized pictures of then Prime Minister John Howard and aspiring prime minister Kim Beasley which we held in front of our faces and then pretended to snog. The point was that both the government and the opposition were 'in bed' together when it came to forest issues. (Page 197)

I recall a time when walking the streets of Hobart I glimpsed an acquaintance from YWAM and Uni sitting in the back of a ute. I remember this event.

In a shallow and mild sense, then, Erik's story and my own overlap by simple accidents of space and time. The insight into his story, however, has caused me to realise that there

is also something of a deeper affinity. I also am a child migrant from England. I also had parents attempting their own version of *The Good Life* in rural Tasmania. I also learned to draw spirituality together with experiences of the land and the wilderness (although nowhere near as adventurously as Erik) and to appreciate the maverick revolutionary nuances of grassroots-focussed greenly-tinged politics. I wasn't home-schooled but, being TV-less for much of my childhood, I dwelt in the lands of books and brains rather than the latest trends and the common narrative of Saturday morning cartoons.

My journey is my journey of course. Erik reveals his own with a fair degree of openness and vulnerability, as well as sensitivity to some of the living, breathing characters that share the narrative with him. The book is constructed as a series of "stories", largely chronological, each one a piece in the mosaic. Once the story progresses past the foundational experiences of his childhood and adolescence there are some clear themes: his environmental activism, his journey of faith, and a broad-spectrum awareness of culture and cultural interaction.

The first of these – environmental activism – is the guise in which I best know Erik. The activism of his youth, including blockades and demonstrations, speaks to the true sense of *activist*; an activist is one who gets into action, who doesn't just sit and whinge but *does* something. His activism is self-generated adventure to be sure, but like any good adventure the reader is caught up in amusement and outrage, empathy and thoughtful reflection.

It is easy, however, to combat engagement with the activist story with cynicism. Erik doesn't always help his case (if this is indeed his intent) as the philosophical grounds for his environmentalism are mostly wrapped inside his own personal responses to a particular event, or they remain hidden inside some stark statistics and presentation of facts. The rights and wrongs of his position are assumed, not argued

for. The point where he does engage however, is where his environmentalist meets his faith. He decries the lack of Christian engagement with environmental issues and is scathing of the use of the “dominion covenant” to justify a purely utilitarian view of the environment which gives no innate value to forests and the like.

Erik the Christian is someone who rests much on spiritual experiences. These experiences are both positive – he references YWAM meetings and other places where the presence of the Holy Spirit are tangible – and negative – aspects of spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry are recounted. And so we encounter the enigmatic figure of an ardent environmentalist merged with a zealous evangelist who is willing to speak of sin and demonic oppression.

He fully admits, however, that his conservatism has waned. I empathise with much of his reflections on the state of society and the church. I have also walked the path of depression as he has and have found refuge in elements of contemplation that are foreign to the fervent pentecostalism of my earlier Christian life. I wonder, though, whether in some areas his conservatism has increased – he is less and less a pacifist, his rejection of multiculturalism as a practical reality seems to strengthen in its resolve as the journey continues. Erik Peacock remains a delightful enigma.

Here, in book form, is what might be called a “coffee conversation in black and white.” This is the sort of stuff – everything from views on home education and politics to military procurement strategies – that naturally flow when wannabe-polymaths share a beverage. You don’t always agree, but iron sharpens iron, good thoughts are thought, and strengthening happens. I am hoping, in my case, that my reading of this book may preempt such a conversation.

For the more general reader, this book can be taken as something of an insight into a generation. Here is the turmoil

of the post-boomers, we who are the receivers of idealism and cynicism in equal parts. We who seek to grasp some of the things of eternity in the face of selfishly purist utility and vacuous political correctness. Here we have angst, passion, depth, frustration, primality and formality shaken up and pressed down. Like it or not, the Erik Peacock's of this world exemplify the current and imminent thought-shapers and leadership of the world. God help us all!