



Coal Miners' Wives: Portraits of Endurance

Carol A.B. Giesen

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Few people in America today live with the dangers and deprivations that Appalachian coal mining families experience. But to the eighteen West Virginia women Carol Giesen interviewed for this book, hard times are just everyday life.

These coal miners' wives, ranging in age from late teens to eighty-five, tell of a way of life dominated by coal mining -- and shadowed by a constant fear of death or injury to a loved one. From birth to old age, they experience the social and economic pressures of the coal mining industry. Few families in these communities earn their living in any job outside a coal mine, and most young men and women find no advantage in completing their education.

Women whose stresses and strengths have seldom been disclosed reveal here their personal stories, their understanding of the dangers of coal mining, their domestic concerns, the place of friends and faith in their lives, and their expectations of the future. What emerges is a deeply moving story of determination in the face of adversity. Over and over, these women deal with the frustrations caused by strikes, layoffs, and mine closings, often taking any jobs they can find while their husbands are out of work. Endlessly; their home concerns revolve around protecting their husbands from additional work or worry. Always there is fear for their husbands' lives and the pervasive anger they feel toward the mining companies. For some, there is also the pain of losing a loved one to the mines. Behind these women's acceptance of their circumstances lies a pragmatic understanding of the politics of mining and of the communities in which they live.

Giesen's insights into the experiences of miners' wives contribute much to our understanding of the impact of industry, economics, and politics on women's lives.

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