



Crossing the Water: Eighteen Months on an Island Working With Troubled Boys -- A Teacher's Memoir

Daniel Robb

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Off the coast of Cape Cod lies a small windswept island called Penikese. Alone on the island is a school for juvenile delinquents, the Penikese Island School, where Daniel Robb lived and worked as a teacher, not far from the mainland town where he grew up. By turns harsh, desolate, and starkly beautiful, the island offers its temporary residents respite from lives filled with abuse, violence, and chaos. But as Robb discovers, peace, solitude, and a structured lifestyle can go only so far toward healing the anger and hurt he finds not only in his students but within himself -- feelings left over from the broken home of his childhood. Lyrical and heartfelt, "Crossing the Water" is the memoir of his first eighteen months on Penikese, and a poignant meditation on the many ways that young men can become lost. Ranging in age from fourteen to seventeen and numbering up to eight at a time, Robb's students at Penikese have been convicted of crimes including arson, assault, and armed robbery. They are tough, troubled kids who are sentenced to the school by courts in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. During their time at Penikese, they live in a house together with the staff of four and share the responsibilities of living on the island -- chopping wood, cooking meals, maintaining and repairing the buildings, caring for the farm animals, and doing other chores. For many of the students, it's the first time they've experienced such a combination of discipline and freedom, or the kind of trust extended to them by the staff. And despite their resistance and sometime wildness, Robb soon finds that they have the capacity not only to confound but to surprise him, both with their insight and their vulnerability. In "Crossing the Water," he renders the boys' voices and his life with them -- the confrontations, the rare epiphanies, the flashes of humor -- with great vividness. Passionate, poetic, and deeply felt, "Crossing the Water" is a powerful and moving book, and the debut of a tremendously gifted young writer.

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