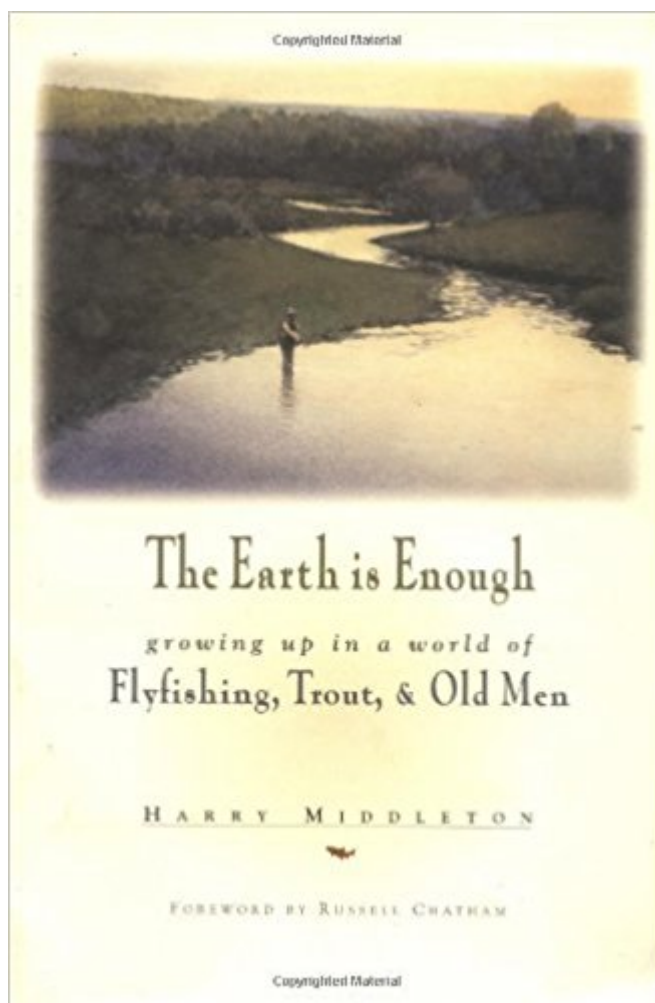


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# The Earth Is Enough: Growing Up In A World Of Flyfishing, Trout & Old Men (The Pruett Series)



## Synopsis

In this touching memoir of his boyhood on a farm in the Ozark foothills, Harry Middleton joins the front rank of nature writers alongside Edward Hoagland and Annie Dillard. It is the year 1965, a year rife with change in the world---and in the life of a boy whose tragic loss of innocence leads him to the healing landscape of the Ozarks. Haunted by indescribable longing, twelve-year-old Harry is turned over to two enigmatic guardians, men as old as the hills they farm and as elusive and beautiful as the trout they fish for---with religious devotion. Seeking strength and purpose from life, Harry learns from his uncle, grandfather, and their crazy Sioux neighbor, Elias Wonder, that the pulse of life beats from within the deep constancy of the earth, and from one's devotion to it. Amidst the rhythm of an ancient cadence, Harry discovers his home: a farm, a mountain stream, and the eye of a trout rising.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"An extraordinary account of the sustaining powers of landscape, of the stewardship of private places, and of those rare people in life who, by their refusal to teach, become our most enlightening teachers. A haunting book, beautiful and funny and sad, written with enormous warmth and grace.

"---Ted Leeson"  
"It is a grand true story and its wonderful old men are classic American characters."  
---Annie Dillard

It was shortly after reading Harry Middleton's *The Earth is Enough* that I made the decision to give

up trout fishing. Since fishing is one of the things my life has been largely about, perhaps this might indicate the vitality, resonance and power of this book. I discovered Middleton later than most, a function of my suspicion of all things new, especially books, and especially squared books of fiction or books with fishing in them. I was aware of this author, but put off reading him, a gesture not unlike circling a sleeping rattler for several years. Now, thinking back, I don't recall exactly what moved me to try. Maybe it was the quotation at the book's beginning by Loren Eiseley, someone I profoundly love and respect. Middleton's own preface was good, too. So, I thought, one page couldn't hurt anything, what was I afraid of? A page it would be then. It was a good one that soon became two, then three, then a blurred rhythm of reading and turning, turning and reading. Everything was there as it should be, the timeless craft of the old, arm in arm with the freshness of a new vision draped around the fundamental constants of life, death, love, God and family. This is a book about love for all things that matter. In this case, one of those things is a simple fish, brook trout to be specific, brook trout living in Starlight Creek which runs through a poor Ozark farm. It is a book about a boy, three men, and a dog; it is the story of youth and age, and of learning. Like *A River Runs Through It*, this tale is based on fact, shaped by fiction, and the grace of it comes from the seamless combination of the two. Unlike MacLean's book, which is inevitably ruled by an abiding Scottish sternness, Middleton's work is something of an organic loose cannon, the texture plush and full of real surprises. In common with *A River Runs Through It*, the elements of humanity, time and place are made rich and true and enervating through genuine passion. Middleton's passion is manifested through intelligence, sensitivity and compassion to create a profound ode to the earth and to mankind, governed by respect, gentleness and humor. At all the appropriate moments this story will make you weep convulsively, burst out laughing, and cause you to ache with longing. The sadness is that these qualities certainly contributed to the doom of their creator. Passion and soul, the dual sources of everything valuable and meaningful, are not very hot commodities in our largely puritanical, Calvinistic, money-driven republic. In a society like ours, layered with ennui, greed, aggressive ignorance, dispassionate, poor-quality living, all soaked in a gooey solution of snake-belly-grade voyeurism a la Oprah et al., the sensitive frequently don't make it. Shortly after reading all of Middleton's books the first time around, I called Jim Pruett, publisher of this current edition (whose urging to read them in the first place I ignored) because I wanted badly to get off a congratulatory letter to Mr. Middleton and I needed his address. Too late, Jim said, he just passed away. I'm only going to whine for a minute because, as Jim Harrison is fond of advising whiners, Go tell it to Anne Frank. To which I might add Dylan Thomas, or Rilke, or Calvin Kentfield, or Ray Carver, or Richard Hugo, or Don Carpenter, or Richard Brautigan, etc., etc. Self-pity won't

get you a packet of ketchup at the cheapest restaurant on earth. But it still hurts to know that Harry Middleton rode the back of a garbage truck every night during the wee hours to put groceries on his family's table. All too frequently, in addition to endless money problems, many artists have difficult personalities and/or drinking problems, three omnipresent occupational speed bumps, any or all of which can be fatal. At the end of this beautiful book, a young Harry Middleton takes a break from school to go back and visit the place where the story takes place. Standing on the hillside in the rain, he reflects: All three men were there . . . . They were of the earth, totally, completely. I stood in the rain for a long time, just looking and trying not to think at all, for I had no wish to make judgments, nor to seek answers, nor harvest messages. It was only important that I had come one last time to this place, a boy's sanctuary. His solace. His home. How dull the stones looked in the rain against the black-browed hills, the dark sky. Only here in these mountains, here with these old men, amid the creek, the trout, the natural world, had I ever ceased to feel alone. I recalled those winter nights on the roof of the farmhouse when we waited for the geese to come overhead and I'd felt like a giant nautilus adrift in a boundless sea. Yet how contented had I felt, even in that reverie, for all I was, all I would be, was inexorably with me there in my chambered shell. Albert, Emerson, Norwell, Elias Wonder, the wildness of the mountains, all of it was with me, and the weight of it all, my time here, set my course, marked my way. So it was still; so it would always be. Russell Chatham Livingston, Montana 1995

Regarding Chatham's forward, some of the reviewers are misquoting him and not understanding what he said. The statement was "...I made the decision to give up trout fishing".... "What Harry Middleton showed me is that if it isn't in your heart and soul, if the essential passion isn't there, don't bother". Chatham was simply saying that with his limited time, he had decided to devote himself to his real passion, steelhead. He had never been passionate about trout fishing, and so he was going to devote himself to flyfishing for what he was passionate about, steelhead. I think the problem for some is that they pick up this book expecting some light John Gierach reading (I love his stories, too) and find themselves knee-deep in the treacherous currents of philosophy, and are afraid they are going to fall-in. Yes, I did find it pedantic at times, but he is a master of atmospheric writing, and this seems fitting; a Southern tradition. The other great Southern tradition is the heritage of oral story-telling, and these stories would be even better read out loud. It is easy to imagine an old man sitting in the woods by a campfire weaving these tales into palpable imagery like my grandpa used to do. I find the book hard to categorize, but hard to put down for long. I look forward to reading his other books.

This is the book that defines Harry Middleton. Unfortunately he didn't live long enough to produce something as big and incredibly valuable as this book. It gives a vivid image of his childhood, and how a group of strange characters that shared the same passion for fly fishing, rescued him of what could have been a spoiled youth. Love for the simple but important things in life is the main idea here. You don't need an afterlife for being happy. The earth is enough!!! The image of those old men, at night, over the roof of their house to see the annual migration of geese had a profound and longstanding impression on me. Since that, I always try to follow my passions that way. You need to read this book. It is a masterpiece.

For years I have been trying to find a book that explains my passion for the outdoors. Behaviors I learned as an adult. Attracted to activities of the earth went unexplained by other participants, but Middleton hit the nail on the head! The Earth is Enough captured my lust and showed me why I feel the way I do. This book is hardly a "how to" fly-fishing or turkey hunting book, but a vivid portrayal of man's connection to his own internal compass using his relationship with the earth as his guide!! I'm speechless, and enamored by his words.

Harry has captured the moment where you find religion in nature. In an unpredictable way. It shares a timeless perspective on life and nature and the calming idea of the rhythm of nature. More than a fly fishing book, it's a love story (for nature.) It's a book of value in a time like this. Respect for nature/elders/life and the ultimate "payoff" for that respect and patience. A life-changing read. These are real sportsmen who live off the land, love books and shun technology (at that time TV and land line...)

Excellent book.

In the preface to a later book, the late Harry Middleton said he was asked by a young student how much of this book was true. His answer was, "More than I want." This is the story of a young boy growing up in a military family, stationed at a staging area during the Vietnam War. When one of his friends is killed - and Harry badly injured - playing with a grenade they found in the jungle, Harry is packed off to his grandfather, a subsistence farmer in the Ozarks of Arkansas. There, with his grandfather, granduncle and the old American Indian, Elias Wonder, Harry is healed, not just of the trauma of seeing his friend disappear in a "pink mist" but healed as well of a great deal of other

things he may not have known ailed him. As Harry learns the rhythms of the land and the mysteries of Starlight Creek from his grandfather and the irascible Elias Wonder, he grows and the reader grows with him. Like David James Duncan's *The River Why*, this is a book about growing up and coming of age, and flyfishing - that "hopeless addiction to trout and the push of water against your legs" - is simply the author's narrative tool. Harry must have been a more patient and willing teenager than I was, or perhaps time has colored over Harry's experience, but there is nothing else to criticize. Beautifully written, exceptionally well told, full of life, sadness, humor, death and understanding. And if flyfishing became an addiction for Harry, that was to haunt him in his later years, well, he was warned and in any event there are far worse fates.

This is a beautiful story of one veteran, two old guys and fishing. But there is a whole philosophy of the GOOD life here.

Not sure how it took me this long to discover Middleton, but it was way too long. Could not put this one down, but I think I will need to read it a few more times to absorb all of its meaning. One thing for certain - this book sure got me calibrated! I wish I could thank him in person.

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