

I've Watched a Billion Years Pass

(The Memoirs of an Appalachian Mountain Rock)

By F. Nelson Stover

Tumultuous times pervaded a fracturing surface, releasing lava from Earth's molten core.
Sun's searing heat seemed cool to us as we congealed atop our ancestors
Hardening them as we, too, took on solid form.
Five miles above the Pre-Cambrian oceans I touched clouds,
Diverted windstorms and forced moisture to return home to the sea.
After the Grenville Orogeny, I watched 400 million years pass while
Seeing our majestic ranges weathering away into an unnamed sea.

During this time, a blazing summer sun scorched sharp mountain ridges.
Soon driving rainstorms and fierce lightening storms
Would return to pummel our barren hillsides.
Winter winds and frigid frozen ice came when the sun headed south
And these, too, abetted the fracturing of our rocky landscape.
No living creatures had invaded any lands rising above the Blue Marble's waters,
Not even the Grenville Mountains where I had originally resided.

A hundred million times the summer sun returned to its zenith.
I watched the sea turn ever more green
As life forms proliferated among the roiling waves.
Feeding on the nutrients washed down from surrounding hills
They grew larger, more complex and more wise and adventuresome.
We could see greenness coming our way, as creatures crept ashore
Overcoming the crush of gravity with cells both strong and yet flexible.

Another hundred million spring times nourished ferns and mosses.
I watched the eastern horizon change ever so slowly
As another land mass crept across Earth's molten mantle.
The stresses of geologic creativity opened gaping holes
Through which tons of molten lava flowed covering my mountain home.
The colliding land masses wrenched the weathered hillsides
And formed the Appalachian Mountains along a new ocean's coast.

Two hundred million winters passed on the still rising Appalachian peaks
Below which I had been buried in the tectonic transformation
Thriving ferns grew to astonishing heights
Turning sunlight into sugar and oxygen in their willow leaves.
Oxygen breathing reptiles, too, flourished on land and sea
Eating plants, and each other, to nourish their ever-larger forms.
Eventually dinosaur footsteps reverberated across the land
Whose grassy ground cover slowed the erosion of my mountain home

Something new came down beside me after another hundred million autumns.
Though deep below the surface, I was joined by a nutrient-seeking tree root.
Capitalizing on complex nutrients built by countless ferns and reptiles.
The tree could produce seeds and multi-hued flowers.
Adventuresome mammals learned to eat the nuts and berries
And the Cenozoic Era blossomed across the Planet Earth.
While the pace of geologic change slowed and the fiercest storms had subsided
But consciousness grew ever more rapidly as carefully choosy creatures proliferated.

Layers of rock above me slowly fell away until I once again
Could watch out over the green valleys and roaring springtime streams
The long narrow valleys below provided the human settlers with fertile lands
For hunting deer, growing crops and raising families.
The rapidly flowing waters provided energy for turning mills
To grind flour and drive gears for looms and lathes.
Periodically, armies marched through en route to distant objectives
And perched their scouts and sentinels near my lofty perch.

I'd watched and waited to see new levels of vitality and cooperation
Would emerge among the increasing diversity of Earth's life forms.
In times of economic hardship, scores of teams crossed our ridges
To build a scenic parkway for visitors from near and far.
One special sunny summer day brought a wandering Carolinian
Listening for narratives of geologic and sociological history.
So I shared my story with this passing poet who wrote it down
To encourage you, too, to participate in the Planet's on-going creative process.

