

Among Wolves - Volume One

author: Berna Bolyn

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Synopsis

author	Berna Bolyn
readBy	Susanna Burney
inLanguage	english

In 1947, one-year-old Berna Bolyn’s family moved to the highest, most remote mountaintop in northeastern Oklahoma on the border with Arkansas. The family of eight had 400,000 acres of Ozark National Forest at their backs and a cluster of Klan families within a 10-mile radius of their property. Two Cherokee land grant families lived four miles away. Berna’s family befriended Chief John Fog and his widowed sister, Grandma Ross. John was a medicine man who cared for people and animals. He and his sister held traditional knowledge of the healing herbs, edible plants, and mushrooms that grew on the edge of the mountain’s natural springs.

Berna’s parents had moved the family to the mountains to help her older brothers, Roy and John, who had returned from World War II and the Korean War with battle fatigue—PTSD. While Berna’s parents worked to build their strawberry farm, Berna’s sisters became her caregivers. By age three, Berna was riding the family’s horse. She rode Bonny near the house and in the family’s strawberry fields. At night, the howls of the timber wolves rose at the edge of the forest. By day, she watched from the safety of their fenced yard as wolf shadows darted around the trees. Sometimes she encountered the pack while riding in the woods. The wolves and she built a kinship as she became part of the wilderness.

The summer before Berna started first grade in the newly built, all-white Klan school, her brothers left the farm with their new wives. Two sisters also married and left as well. One sister, still in high school, stayed away as much as she could. At age five, Berna was left to care for her elderly parents. It was the summer she learned to survive. It was the summer she ran with the wolves and witnessed a terrifying ceremony in the valley far below, where, first, a string of burning torches formed a large circle. Then, huge flames rose in the shape of a cross.

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