



Bill McKibben, *Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist*. New York: Times Books, 2013. 272 pp. Hardcover \$26.00. Paperback \$15.99. Epub \$9.99.

Bill McKibben has been the pioneering voice for climate change awareness for over two decades. *Oil and Honey* is a testament to his prolific career as a journalist, author, and spokesperson for preserving the planet. The memoir intertwines McKibben's journey to environmental activism with vignettes portraying his friendship with fellow Vermonter Kirk Webster – a beekeeper who runs an independent chemical-free apiary. Webster also provides philosophical lessons that go beyond the world of bees: “If you want honey you need a hive of bees. But if you were trying to decide if making honey was a good idea, bees would be the last creatures to ask. You know what their answer is going to be.”

Bees are stubborn creatures, but so are oil companies. In *Oil and Honey*, McKibben encounters hive-minded corporations and lobbyists as he campaigns against the Keystone XL pipeline. The project's completion could result in catastrophic amounts of carbon emissions, so McKibben utilizes the last line of defense in such dire situations – civil disobedience. The arrest of 1,253 protestors in Washington D.C., among them McKibben, stymies Keystone XL's approval. Incarceration only strengthens his leadership as he realizes the collective strength of a movement when fighting for a global cause. “When people ask me where they should move to be safe from climate change, I always tell them anyplace with a strong community,” he writes.

With the backing of his grass-roots supporters, McKibben initiates cross-country campaigns to bring climate change to the forefront of political discussions. Through his website 350.org, he coordinates international demonstrations for environmental preservation. The numbers are scary, but his insightful style reaches national audiences. He wryly responds to climate deniers along the way, but holds firm in his positions. The book recounts nasty e-mail exchanges, political rallies, and whimsical reflections through the Vermont countryside. Regardless, McKibben always comes back to bees. His own fast-paced activist world is contrasted with the calm climate of Webster's apiary, and the business of bees can be a lesson in the potential of small-scale farming as well as community organizing.

McKibben writes with a sense of urgency and hope, and he holds faith in the power of numbers. The book reminds us how difficult it is to see progress in the fight against climate change – one must often sacrifice his/her own personal goals in order to lead such a pressing battle. In his journeys, McKibben confesses to missing his native state often. He writes about not being a natural activist, but learning to lead out of necessity. In *Oil and Honey*, he discovers how guiding a movement is essential to preserve the land he cares so deeply about.

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