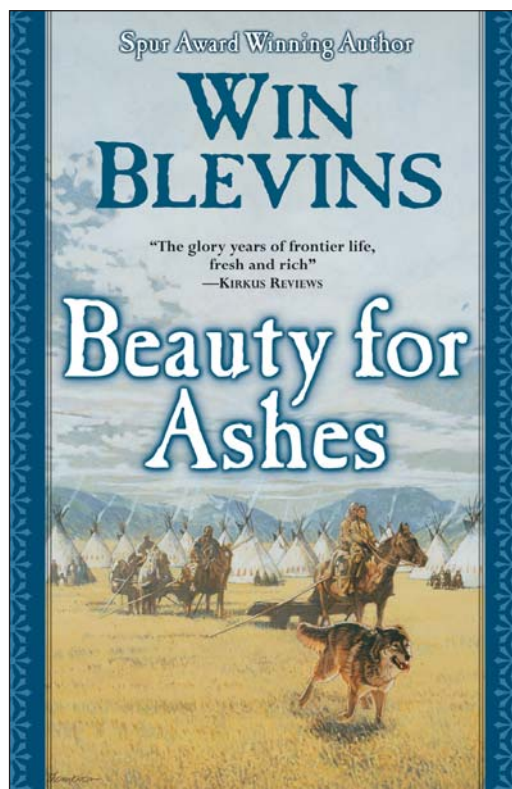




# Win Blevins

## Beauty for Ashes



384 pages • 0-765-34482-3

"His gritty fiction brings to mind the fur-trading novels of Frederick Manfred (*Lord Grizzly*, 1954) and Vardis Fisher (*Mountain Man*). The glory years of frontier life, fresh and rich" —KIRKUS REVIEWS

"[Sam Morgan is] continually battling wilderness, weather and the vicissitudes of fortune. His birthday-suit-bare escape from a Lakota camp is one of the most riveting episodes of recent Western fiction. And when Sam and his Crow bride prepare to accompany Jedediah Smith to the great Western Ocean, in the next of Blevins's *Rendezvous* series, the reader will gladly follow them all the way."

—TRUE WEST

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

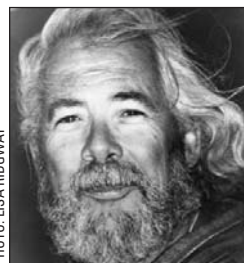


PHOTO: LISA RIDGWAY

**Win Blevins**, of Welsh, Irish, and Cherokee descent, came out of Missouri and Arkansas and went through a whirlwind of colleges and jobs. At thirty-three, then the principal movie and theater critic of the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, he discovered his calling, writing

books. Nineteen volumes of fiction, informal history, and lexicography have followed. His historical novel about *Crazy Horse*, *Stone Song*, won the Spur Award and the Mountains and Plains Booksellers award; he won another Spur for the first novel in his *Rendezvous* series, *So Wild a Dream*, and was named Writer of the Year in 2003 by Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers for his *Dictionary of the American West*.

A devoted Westerner, hiker, river-rafter, mountaineer, and musician, he was lucky enough to discover Meredith Blevins in 1998. They live and write in a remote corner of the canyonlands of Utah.

**WIN SAYS**, When I was a kid, my chorus was, "Daddy, tell me a story." (Note that it wasn't, "Give me a lecture.") As a man and a writer I have come to believe in the power of story. Stories bind us as families, as ethnic groups, as nationalities—they tell us what it means to be a Blevins, a Westerner, an American; more important, they tell us what it means to be fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, friends, neighbors, workers, lovers, and so bind us together as a human community.

Stories enable us to heal ourselves. Stories give us a chance to do high play in fantasy. Most of all, stories help us simply to see richly—to embrace this oddity, wonder, and miracle called life with our eyes, our minds, our imaginations, and our spirits. What I love about story is not what it means but what it is. How the tale swings forth, how its characters do their dance, how its world looks and feels. (Give me some moves in the telling, please.)

Critics say they want novels to have something serious to say. I ask, why not something beguiling, scintillating, sexy, scary, and enthralling? I like stories that speak not only to

the intellect but to the senses, the emotions, the imagination, and the spirit. What I like most is the pure, delightful illusion of being in the author's imaginary world. I hope my stories give these pleasures. I also hope I'm able to tell stories that offer healing in our cynical, despairing, even nihilistic time; that offer joy in an era of paralysis by analysis; that offer Spirit in the era that has declared God dead.

I wear proudly a tee shirt that says on the front, MEMBER OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST PROFESSION, and on the back, STORYTELLER.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Trapping beaver was the major source of income for mountain men in the Rocky Mountain West of the 1820s—the luxuriant, sought-after pelts could make a man rich. But it was a dangerous way to make a living: winter blizzards, hostile Indians, sickness, and starvation lurked at every point of the compass. Only a special brand of man could survive it all.

After making a harrowing seven hundred mile journey alone and on foot from the Sweetwater River in Wyoming to Fort Atkinson on the Missouri River and finding a home in the fur trade, young Sam Morgan is becoming just such a man. Followed closely by Coy, his faithful coyote pup, and trapping with a brigade of mountain men, Sam seeks more than furs and wealth. He is searching for the love of his life, the Crow Indian woman Meadowlark. With his companions—the French-Canadian Gideon Poor Boy, the mulatto Jim Beckwourth, and the Pawnee Third Wing—he heads for the Wind River country and the village of Meadowlark's people.

Sam is put to every test in his journey to the Crow village: fights with Pawnee, Lakota, and Blackfeet; captivity and escape from a Sioux camp; buffalo hunts; and the distrust of Meadowlark's family and tribe. He endures the sweat lodge and Sun Dance ceremonies that test his beliefs and self-confidence, and concocts a last-ditch, daring, and foolhardy scheme to win Meadowlark's hand.

For all its page-turning action, *Beauty for Ashes* is the unforgettable story of a boy who becomes a man by necessity in the cruel, beautiful, unexplored wilderness of the Old West.

## PRAISE FOR MEREDITH BLEVINS

"Win Blevins has long since won his place among the West's very best." —TONY HILLERMAN

"Blevins possesses a rare skill in masterfully telling a story-to-paper. He is a true storyteller in the tradition of Native people."

—LEE FRANCIS, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

"No one since the great A. B. Guthrie, Jr, has a better feel for the world of the mountain man." —DON COLDSMITH

"There are few who can write of the early Far West and the era of the fur trade with as much authority and insight as does Win Blevins. When you open one of his novels, you'd best be prepared to jump bareback on a half-broke Indian cayuse that will tear off beneath you, the wind whipping across your face as you are carried hither among the high and distant places without let-up, without stop until you reach the last page." —TERRY JOHNSTON

"Win Blevins is the master of early frontier fiction."

—W. MICHAEL GEAR AND KATHLEEN O'NEAL GEAR,  
AUTHORS OF *PEOPLE OF THE MOON*

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were Indian people's attitudes toward interracial marriage? How were they different from attitudes today?
2. What were the racial and cultural backgrounds of the mountain men? What languages did they speak? Do you think the membership of Indian, Mexican, and black in their brigades changed their racial attitudes from the dominant ones of the time?
3. How did mountain men treat the Native peoples? How does this contrast with the treatment from the emigrants? From the army and the government?
4. The mountain men adopted Indian dress, often had Indian families, and sometimes accepted Indian religion. They were often criticized by Eastern Americans for having "gone Indian." Do you share this view?
5. Sam Morgan had no interest in commerce or industrialization, but was fascinated by wild country and the skills needed to live there. Was Sam a reactionary in his own time? What is characteristically American, if anything, in his desire to journey to the unexplored West?

6. Do you think of the mountain men as living on the frontier, or beyond the frontier? How were they like and unlike the Westerners who came after them, emigrants, cowboys, miners, Mormons, sheepmen, soldiers, and so on?

7. Sam sought truth by going through a Sun Dance. What did that experience mean to him? Do you believe mystical insights are possible through such ceremonies? Potentially important?

## WHAT WAS A MOUNTAIN MAN?

A Rocky Mountain trapper from about 1810-1840. He was most likely to be a American Backwoodsman or a French-Canadian. A good many were also Delaware Indians, Iroquois Indians, or Spaniards from New Mexico. A few were New Englanders, Britishers, or blacks.

Typically the mountain man wore a buckskin shirt, leggings, a breechcloth, and moccasins. He was skillful with flint and steel, the beaver trap, and a muzzleloading rifle, and at least as skilled in getting along with Indians.

Often, in fact, he had an Indian wife and children. When the price of beaver dropped in the late 1830s, the lucky mountain men became guides; some went to the West Coast as pioneers, and the rest went back to civilization, to dream of the mountains and of grand adventures painted in a palette of vibrant colors.

Their time was short, but their lessons for us, now, are huge. Their goal was to live with the land, not to tame it. Their intention was to learn Indian ways, not to subdue or “enlighten” the Indian people. History has short-changed the era of the mountain man.

Working together, mountain men learned that all men and women have faults and heroic qualities, and these were as likely to be seen in one race as another. Their survival depended upon knowing we are equally flawed and exceptional.

In this, they were one step ahead of many of us today.