



We Are Not Afraid

By Homer Hickam

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In his best-selling memoir *October Sky* (aka *Rocket Boys*), Hickam introduced us to the rugged town of his youth, Coalwood, West Virginia, and the people who took on the hazardous and often brutal enterprise of coal mining. To survive and prosper, these people relied on an approach to living that would get them through hard times with an almost unnatural resilience. Over a lifetime, they learned to take on these attitudes:

- We are proud of who we are.
- We stand up for what we believe.
- We keep our families together.
- We trust in God but rely on ourselves.

These attitudes are summed up in the Coalwood Assumption:

• WE ARE NOT AFRAID

Through poignant memories of his youth, best selling author Homer Hickam helps lead you beyond fear to find the courage and strength to live more happily and look toward to future with optimism.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Hickam's latest book is a little different from the other feel-good stories that emerged nationwide after the September 11 attacks. What sets his stories apart is where they all take place: the mining town of Coalwood, W.Va., the setting for his bestselling memoirs *Sky of Stone* and *October Sky*. In this inspirational guide to overcoming fear, Hickam shares anecdotes from his life, mainly having to do with the values he learned in the small, humble town of Coalwood. Each chapter explains one of the "Coalwood Attitudes" ("we are proud of who we are"; "we stand up for what we believe"; "we keep our families together"; and "we trust in God but rely on ourselves"); Hickam then finishes by delivering the kicker (or "The Coalwood Assumption," as he calls it): "we are not afraid." Although it would be easy to dismiss his yarns and advice as hokey or cutesy, Hickam's retelling of a wholesome upbringing in Coalwood is quite touching and heartening, providing assistance for the uncertainty many Americans have dealt with recently and will continue to face in the months ahead. "In today's world, fear seems to be everywhere," he writes. "If you want to stop being afraid... this book can help by teaching you a philosophy of life that will fill your heart and soul with a sense of well-being and confidence." Reading about how Hickam handled bullies in the fifth grade or how he didn't let fear overcome him while fighting in Vietnam may not change what happened last September, but it will give readers the gumption to persevere when the going gets rough. (Feb.) Forecast: It's obvious HCI is not afraid of betting on this book: they're planning a \$100,000 ad campaign, a 20-city TV and radio satellite tour and appearances on morning news and daytime talk shows. The 400,000-copy first printing ensures they'll be ready for the run.

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About the Author

Homer Hickam is the author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *October Sky* (aka *Rocket Boys*) which received a National Book Critics Circle nomination and was named a New York Times Notable Book of 1998. He is the author of the "Coalwood Trilogy" (*October Sky*, *The Coalwood Way* and *Sky of Stone*), *Back to the Moon* and *Torpedo Junction*. He is also a decorated Vietnam combat veteran, retired NASA engineer, an Olympic torch-bearer, and the holder of Alabama's highest award for heroism. He lives with his wife in Huntsville, Alabama. Click here to visit Homer Hickam's website.

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Why You Should Read This Book

In today's world, fear seems to be everywhere. Sometimes it's an immediate fear caused by a sense of imminent danger. When terrible things happen before our eyes, instant fear is a normal reaction. Our minds are designed to dredge up fear in such times so that adrenaline will spurt through our veins and our heart rates will speed up. That gets us ready to escape or fight. This is a good, rational kind of fear that is meant to be temporary and get us past an immediate crisis.

The problem is that there are so many folks in the world today who are always afraid. This was true even before the atrocities of September 11, 2001. Along with fear, dread also seems to have gained a foothold everywhere. Dread is the little voice that keeps whispering to us about all the bad things that might happen. When a constant sense of dread takes over, people start to avoid doing much of anything. It becomes a habit.

They're afraid to fly, to travel, to take new jobs, to consider new concepts and ideas. Everyday challenges of life become too much to handle. The joy of living is lost to despair.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is little doubt that we Americans live in perilous times. We have real enemies who wish us ill. In fact, some of them would like to kill us and have said so, out loud and in no uncertain terms. That's pretty scary. We also live in an ever-changing world that is often unpleasant and hard to understand. The economy goes from dizzying heights to recession for no reason we can discern, new diseases threaten that can't be cured, politicians manipulate and control us, and our scientists go too far and too fast. Every day, it seems some kind of craziness assaults us. As rational beings, we start to think maybe it would be best to just hunker down and pull the blankets over our heads. Life seems too dangerous and frightening to enjoy. We wonder if we'll ever be happy again. This is the kind of thinking that makes us wide open to letting fear and dread take over our lives.

Dread and fear are really a nasty pair. Once they become a habit, they can be difficult to beat. A lot of times people fall into the habits of fear and dread without even realizing it. Self-pity, being negative, timidity or constant worry are all symptoms of being afraid. So is an inability to hold a family together. There is plenty of speculation as to why so many people have become habitually fearful, not just of war or terrorism or disease, but of simply living. Some say it's because of a pervasive media that constantly bombards us with stories of pain and suffering and evil. Or maybe it's because our new Internet society cuts us off from the realities of life, both good and bad. From wherever it comes, there is no doubt fear is persistent in our land and dread a constant whisper. People have become hooked on being afraid.

If you want to stop being afraid, or if you want to avoid the habits of fear and dread, this book can help by teaching you a philosophy of life that will fill your heart and soul with a sense of well-being and confidence. It is a philosophy that was developed by real people who led good, happy and hearty lives while managing to raise a crop of children who went on to have successful lives of their own. The people who developed and lived this fear-destroying philosophy were the people who raised me. As their example and teachings helped me to be strong and unafraid, my accounts of who they were and what they did can also help you to beat fear and keep dread on the run. They can be the model for the rest of your life.

A few years ago, I wrote about growing up in the little mining town of Coalwood, West Virginia, in a book titled *Rocket Boys*. It was a huge success, and Universal Studios made a popular movie based on it, calling the film *October Sky*. Since then, *Rocket Boys* (its mass-market version is also titled *October Sky*) has sold nearly a million copies. I followed *Rocket Boys* with two more bestselling books about life in Coalwood, *The Coalwood Way* and *Sky of Stone*. These form what I call the Coalwood trilogy.

When I wrote my books about Coalwood, I only hoped to write good stories to entertain my readers. But since their publication and the making of the movie, I have been humbled by thousands of heartfelt letters and e-mails from people around the world thanking me for the inspiration they've received. I am humbled, mainly because the stories I told reflect not my wisdom but that of the Coalwood of my youth. I am simply the voice of the people who raised me.

Because so many people admire my books and the movie *October Sky*, I am one of the most requested speakers in the country. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, I sensed a need from audiences to hear about the brave people of my hometown and how they taught me lessons of strength and courage. As a result, hundreds of people came up to me after my speeches and said my stories had helped them work past their fears. They even showed me their notes! Nearly all of them also said I should write a book, one based on the beliefs and attitudes of the people who raised me.

I am not a philosopher. I have no academic degrees in either psychology, or sociology or any other kind of -

ology. But I was raised by a wise and steady and strong people who tested their approach to life during good times and bad. It is their wisdom I have to give, not my own. That is why I decided to write this book-so that everyone can have access to their philosophy. Their attitudes sustained them and let them live full, happy lives without fear or dread. Adopting their attitudes as your own can do the same for you. That's why you should read this book.

What was it about Coalwood that caused the development of a way of life that defeated fear? The Coalwood I write about was the one I knew when I was a boy growing up in the 1940s and 1950s. During that time, it might be fairly said that the town always lived during perilous times. At its center sat a deep coal mine, one entered by going straight down a long, narrow, vertical shaft that dropped nearly a thousand feet. It was a dangerous mine that could quickly fill with explosive methane gas and its roof was a jumble of razor-edged rock. Every day, the men of Coalwood entered that mine to dig out coal, an inherently risky proposition. That required courage, but not the kind that men can show in an instant. Coalwood's miners had to figure out how to be brave over a long period of time. The same was true for Coalwood's women. Every day, they sent their husbands off to work the deep coal, knowing very well they might not ever see them again. It is impossible to do that year after year without developing a philosophy of life that defeats fear and puts aside the feelings of constant dread. Coalwood's people figured out how to stop being afraid over the long haul, and this is the wisdom this book seeks to give its readers.

There are a few other things that should be understood about my hometown so that its wisdom makes more sense. During most of its existence, Coalwood was a pure company town. That meant not only the mine was owned by the company but so was everything else-*everything*! The houses we lived in were company-owned. The company built the roads and the fences. All the stores were company stores. All the adult men in Coalwood worked for the company. The doctor and dentist were company men, their services provided free. The preachers were also company men and since the churches were company-owned, we liked to say we got the low-bid religion. We said that with a grin. Our religion was of our souls and our hearts and our minds, not of any particular denomination. But the point I'm making is that Coalwood and its people were one and the same. The knowledge that everyone is working toward the same goal is very powerful. It can provide tremendous strength and support.

The adult women of Coalwood were either married to company men or were teachers at the Coalwood School. The men of the town had a job, that of mining out the coal, but the women had what was considered a more important job, that of keeping the family together and caring for the children, *all* of the children. Every adult woman in town could, if the situation warranted it, apply her hand to the backside of a wayward child, even if the child didn't belong to her, in order to give immediate guidance in the correct path of personal behavior. The women in town were pretty much unified in what that correct path was supposed to be. As a boy prone to more than a little mischief, I got small love taps on my posterior from time to time that transmitted that information very well! The women never hurt me, not once, but it was just a perfectly applied light swat that got my attention in a positive way.

For some reason, my life in Coalwood was often spent as an observer. It was as if from my earliest reckoning of where I lived, I knew I was in a special place and needed to record it. In 1949, when I was in the second grade, I started my own newspaper to write down all that I could see. My friend Roy Lee Cooke joined me in my little enterprise, which I called, perhaps not creatively but at least accurately, *The Coalwood News*. Roy Lee and I scoured the town for stories and then laboriously hand-printed each paper, for which we charged a nickel. We always sold out. Our stories tended toward the personal, and that perhaps was the reason for their popularity. If we saw a lady at the company store, for instance, we followed her around and wrote down everything she bought, including the SSS tonic the missus thought might be just the thing to perk up her husband's romantic inclinations. If we saw a man lolling around on the post office steps chewing tobacco and then observed his wife out tending the vegetable garden, we jotted that down, too, wondering in print why

one was lolling and chewing while the other was working? We pretty much stuck our noses into everybody's business, and that meant everybody loved our little newspaper except maybe the folks who found themselves in it. There were a lot of complaints sent sailing over the gossip fence in the direction of my mother, hoping she would shut our little news sheet down.

Mom resisted the demands for the extinction of *The Coalwood News* until I wrote about a lady who fell down in the creek and got her behind pinched by a big, mad crawl-dad. I especially liked the way I described the little dance she did, crow-hopping up on the creek bank and spinning around like a top. It was that story that went beyond even my mom's liberal attitude toward the press since the lady doing the crow-hopping was Elsie Lavender Hickam, my mother herself. My First Amendment rights in Coalwood were completely and utterly suspended for the remainder of time or the extinction of the universe, whichever came last. But I kept observing the attitudes of my people and learning from them. I still do.

The Coalwood I write about was the town I knew growing up, from my birth in 1943 until I left to go into the army in 1966. I was part of a generation who benefited from the earned wisdom of a great people who inspired their children to also be great. As a Coalwood boy, I came to understand at a very early age that God had determined that there was no joy greater than hard work, and he made no water holier than the sweat off one's brow; but I also understood that love is God's gift to us that we might share it, and it is also the ache in our soul if it might be lost. The people of Coalwood faced each day the dangers of the coal mine and the isolation of the mountains. To survive and to have a good life demanded living in a simple and realistic way. There could be no pretending that their world was anything but hard and arduous and often filled with danger. This understanding of the fundamental nature of life resulted in a practical, no-nonsense, yet often humor-filled, approach to living that got them through the worst of times with an almost unnatural resilience and a special kind of fortitude. Over a lifetime, they learned to take on these attitudes:

*We are proud of who we are.
We stand up for what we believe.
We keep our families together.
We trust in God but rely on ourselves.*

These attitudes were summed up by a singular assumption. It was an assumption that was as normal to the people of Coalwood as breathing. They always seemed to be saying it, not out loud but in the manner in which they took on every challenge and every danger that came their way:

We are not afraid.

In the following pages, I will explain how each attitude worked to give the people of my hometown a happy, fearless life. Since I'm essentially a storyteller, I'll tell stories to illustrate how Coalwood's people taught their children and each other to live with strength and courage and dignity. In Other Voices, I will include stories written by others who grew up in Coalwood or nearby. As you get to know the people who raised me, I hope that you will come to understand their attitudes toward life and adopt them as your own. If you do, I am confident you will join the good people of my hometown and say, believe and assume, no matter what may come your way:

We are not afraid.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Benny Joiner:

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Anna Harlow:

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because when you find yourself reading a book particularly book entitled We Are Not Afraid your brain will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every aspect that maybe unfamiliar for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging each word written in a e-book then become one application form conclusion and explanation that maybe you never get just before. The We Are Not Afraid giving you one more experience more than blown away your brain but also giving you useful info for your better life in this era. So now let us show you the relaxing pattern is your body and mind is going to be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a. Do you want to try this extraordinary paying spare time activity?

Billy Gallardo:

The book untitled We Are Not Afraid contain a lot of information on this. The writer explains the girl idea with easy means. The language is very easy to understand all the people, so do not necessarily worry, you can easy to read it. The book was authored by famous author. The author brings you in the new period of time of literary works. You can read this book because you can read more your smart phone, or model, so you can read the book throughout anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can open their official web-site and order it. Have a nice study.

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