



Angels by the River: A Memoir

James Gustave Speth

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Reflections on race, environment, politics, and living on the front lines of change

In *Angels by the River*, James Gustave "Gus" Speth recounts his unlikely path from a southern boyhood through his years as one of the nation's most influential mainstream environmentalists and eventually to the system-changing activism that shapes his current work. Born and raised in an idyllic but racially divided town that later became the scene of South Carolina's horrific Orangeburg Massacre, Speth explores how the civil rights movement and the South's agrarian roots shaped his later work in the heyday of the environmental movement, when he founded two landmark environmental groups, fought for the nation's toughest environmental laws, spearheaded programs in the United Nations, advised the White House, and moved into a leading academic role as dean of Yale's prestigious School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Yet, in the end, he arrived somewhere quite unexpected—still believing change is possible, but not within the current political and economic system. Throughout this compelling memoir, Speth intertwines three stories—his own, his hometown's, and his country's—focusing mainly on his early years and the lessons he drew from them, and his later years, in which he comes full circle in applying those lessons. In the process he invites others to join him politically at or near the place at which he has arrived, wherever they may have started.

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