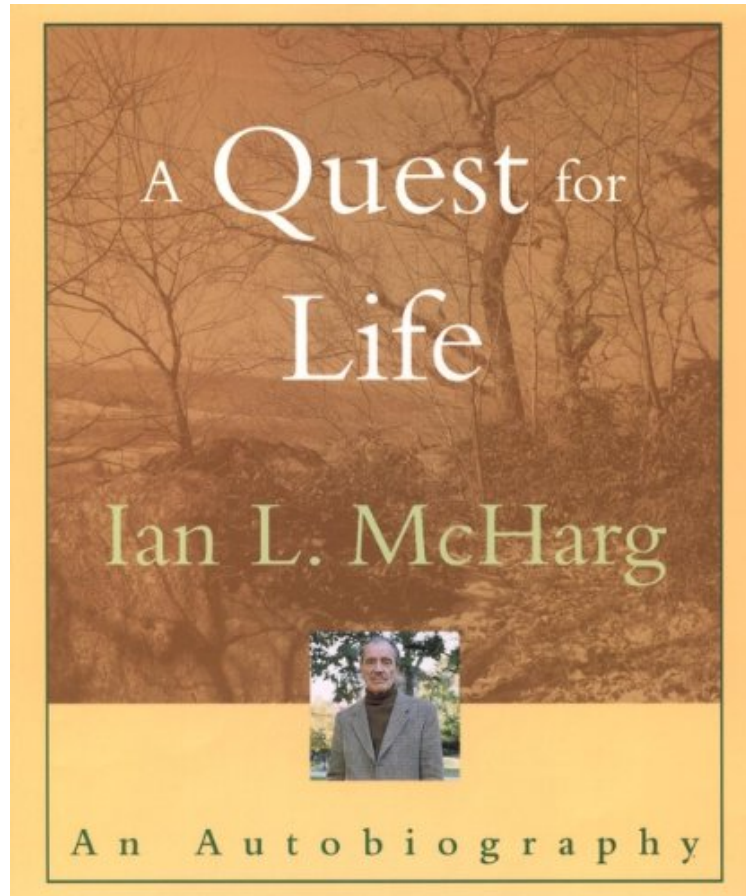


## A Quest for Life: An Autobiography

*Ian L. McHarg*

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**Ian L. McHarg : A Quest for Life: An Autobiography** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Quest for Life: An Autobiography:

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where Ian McHarg had a hand will appreciate learning about his eventful life. Among the projects where Ian McHarg was involved include Baltimore's Inner Harbor, the creation of 110 more acres in Manhattan through landfill, the first Earth Day, and his milestone book "Design with Nature". Many credit "Design with Nature" as a major force in creating legislation requiring ecological considerations when planning construction. People unfamiliar with Ian McHarg's work will appreciate reading of his life's struggles, from combat in World War II, fighting tuberculosis four decades ago when survival rates were much lower, and founding the Landscape Architecture program at the University of Pennsylvania with no faculty, no office, and no students. A fascinating person has written an excellent book.

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 By Leon Czikowsky Ian McHarg has written an autobiography that informs while successfully capturing his bold character. Ian McHarg minces no words. He recalls the incident where he gave public testimony claiming that highway engineers seem to "have a deep insecurity as to their masculinity which can only be appeased by mutilating nature", among other similar ventures. This autobiography informs us how a person of such outspokenness has emerged and gained respect. His childhood outside Glasgow, Scotland at the city's edge where homes met nature made him realize, at an early age, the advantages of an environment outside of blocks of treeless tenement homes. Possessing neither an undergraduate degree nor a high school diploma, he entered Harvard's graduate program in Landscape Architecture by telegraphing them and requesting that arrangements be made for his arrival and entrance into their school. He repaid his department by becoming Student Council Chairman and pushing through a resolution of no confidence in his department. Upset that the Landscape Architect faculty focused on designing gardens for the wealthy, Ian McHarg became an advocate that landscape architecture is for all. Further, he would argue, we all should respect nature.

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"Show me any civilization that believes that reality exists only because man can perceive it, that the cosmos was erected to support man on its pinnacle, that man is exclusively divine, and then I will predict the nature of his cities and its landscapes, the hot dog stands, the neon shill, the tacky-tacky houses, the sterile core, the mined and ravaged countryside. This is the image of anthropocentric man. He seeks not unity with nature but conquest, yet unity he finds, when his arrogance and ignorance are stilled and he lies dead under the greensward." Ian L. McHarg *Multiply and Subdue the Earth*, 1969 "No living American has done more to usher the gentle science of ecology out of oblivion and into mainstream thought than Ian McHarg; a teacher, philosopher, designer, and activist who changed the way we view and shape our environment." From the foreword by Stewart L. Udall

Published in cooperation with the Center for American Places, Harrisonburg, Virginia *A Quest for Life* is the autobiography of a man who stands alongside Rachel Carson, Lewis Mumford, and Aldo Leopold as one of the giants of the environmental movement. In a robust and singular voice, Ian McHarg recounts the story of a life that has foreshadowed and eventually shaped environmental consciousness in the twentieth century. Along the way we meet prominent figures in the environmental movement, the design fields, and the government, from Walter Gropius to Lady Bird Johnson, all presented in rich and telling anecdotes. Early in *A Quest for Life* McHarg presents us with an arresting image. Describing the view from his boyhood home on the outskirts of Glasgow, he tells us that in one direction he could see the industrial miasma of smokestacks, tenements, and treeless streets, and, in another, the glories of the Scottish countryside. "I was born and bred," he writes, "on a fulcrum with two poles, city and countryside." Confronted with such a stark contrast, the man who was to become "the founder of ecological planning" began at an early age to turn literally from inhumane urban development and toward the beauty and power of Nature. Each chapter of this book illuminates key stages in McHarg's life and in the evolution of his environmental awareness. We see him as a youth standing on a hillside beside the impressive Donald Wintersgill who, with the wave of his cane, lays out an entire village complete with lakes and forests, and thus introduces the astonished McHarg to the profession of landscape architecture. In some of the bloodiest battles of the Second World War he witnesses the magnitude of human destructive capability. Later, when he faces a crisis of conscience over his religious training and its exhortation to gain dominion over life and subdue the earth, he begins to develop a deep spiritual appreciation for the sanctity of Nature itself. His training as a designer and planner in the Modernist Bauhaus tradition, with its neglect of the environment; his bouts with tuberculosis that showed him the link between public health and city planning; his famous "Man and The Planetary Disease" speech before powerful industrialists; all stand as emblematic of battles that are still being fought today. *A Quest for Life* also chronicles the many triumphs in McHarg's career. It offers fresh insight into the

revolutionary design method behind his groundbreaking book, *Design with Nature*, and explores the development of geographical information systems. We learn firsthand about his work on the celebrated regional plans for Denver and the Twin Cities, as well as the Woodlands new town project. His most enduring contribution, however, may prove to be his four decades of teaching at the University of Pennsylvania.