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Farm Girl



Synopsis

“It concerns real life, relatively ordinary activities, drawn with the precision of a Norman Rockwell painting.” The Omaha Reader Set in the Dust Bowl of the American West, this true account of a child coming of age on a 1920’s Nebraska farm, recaptures an era. Young Lucille Marker experiences survival during the Depression, one of the worst dust storms in history, and finally the disintegration of the close-knit community in which she grows up. Readers who like the books of Laura Ingalls Wilder or Willa Cather will enjoy Farm Girl. It takes place on the Marker farm, located near Red Cloud, the locale of Willa Cather’s Nebraska novels. Farm Girl takes one back to a time and place that no longer exists in American culture. Richly photographed throughout with over sixty authentic photos documenting the people and places of the story, this historical, easy-to-read book is suitable for use in the classroom. "Farm Girl presents a vision of life on a Nebraska homestead during the 1920s and 1930s, told from a child's perspective, and illustrated with photographs of the time." --Quincy Herald Whig "Farm Girl will capture the interest of readers in the photos the book contains and witty recollections Lucille has of her grandparents in Catherton Township." --The Red Cloud Chief "Have you thought about writing your family history, but found yourself stuck from the start? Writing a family narrative can be a daunting task, but Karen Jones Gowen found a way to bring her mother's story to life." --Homespun Magazine

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I just love this story! I grew up with a similar heritage, rich with the stories told after dinner by older relatives. This gives a real sense of the hard work involved with homesteading the prairie. Our ancestors were strong people who left a life they knew for the uncertain life in America's heartland. Filled with a true variety of characters from the hard-workers to fussbudgets. The story runs strong from the mid 1800's until the end of the drought years which encompassed the Depression. It only lightly touches on the World Wars and events after 1950. This book made me once again realize the wonderful gift my parents and grand-parents gave me by telling all those stories of our heritage. The story flowed well, perhaps because I am familiar with the subject matter and know first hand about chickens, snakes, hay mows and churning butter.

As a Brit, I do not know much about American history. Reading Farm Girl I have learned so much more about past lifestyles and disasters. About how a race pulled together and how families were divided by the search for work. The author has written a tender memoir via her mother. I loved learning about the foods, the clothing and how one woman painted her way out of The Depression. How she enabled her family to have a better life despite the odds being against them. Simply written in a gentle style, this book is ideal for pleasurable memoir moments or classroom reading. The photographs were a wonderful addition.

I liked this book a lot. It is a charming memoir without self-pity, sentimentality, or a lecturing tone of "we had it so much worse than you did." From the introduction, it sounds like Karen "primed the pump" to get Lucille's memories going and then just let them flow, and that's how the book reads. It meanders a bit and there's sometimes not a lot of "point" to a particular story. I never got the feeling that there was a specific goal or path in mind, just the journey - which, really, is what life is all about. Lucille matter-of-factly acknowledges that she was a loved and spoiled child, a fact which I think is borne out by the photographs. It seems unusual to have so many relatively casual photos of a small child from this era (although I could just be completely off-base here) and I was touched by them. I particularly liked the one of her drinking from the "hydrant." The paintings were lovely, and I thought they were an unusual and interesting addition to the book, although certainly not all that

impressive on my Kindle e-ink reader. The worst thing I can say about it is that the writing is a bit unpolished, but I would balance that by saying that I think to polish this book would be to run the risk of ruining it.

I grew up reading the "Little House" series of books, and other fans of that series will enjoy this book. Obviously, it is set at a later time period, although it does discuss the pioneer grandparents who moved out west to homestead and eventually help found a town. The author writes from the POV of her mother quite effectively, and she lived an interesting life. She even moves to the "big city" for high school during the Depression years. I was especially drawn to the narrator's mother (the author's grandmother), who was an artist. Nowadays we might assume that all of the duties of a farmer's wife would be so exhausting she would have no energy for her art, but it was pretty amazing at how creative and productive she was. She even helped to support her family during the Depression by trading artwork for dry goods or by selling them. An appendix includes an essay she wrote about her life. I kind of wish I had purchased a "real" book instead of the Kindle version because of the many photos of family members and the mother's paintings. My Kindle is B & W and I wondered if the photos of the paintings were in color. Also, if I had the print book I would have loaned it to my parents to read, as I'm sure it would spark their memories, and then added it to my classroom library. While the book is written for adults, I would say that the vocabulary, interest level, and content would be fine for upper elementary and up. In fact, it might be a fun summer reading book for a grandparent and older grandchild to read and discuss, kind of like a book club, and it would be sure to foster some interesting discussions.

This is an absolutely wonderful book about farm life on the prairie. While the setting was in Nebraska, the story could have been located in almost any prairie state as almost all the farm families lived a similar lifestyle. In fact, I can remember my mother-in-law telling me similar stories of growing up in the "dirty thirties" and the dust bowl. She lived in western South Dakota. She also espoused similar values written about in this story. She believed in thrift, hard work, paying in cash and going to church. In fact, her father was a Congregationalist minister so she also had a good Christian upbringing that included simpler amusements much like what is written in Farm Girl. For a look into the past, and to learn more about what was and probably still is the backbone of America, read this book. Based on my ranch family history, I can truly state this book is accurate while being entertaining. Highly recommend.

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