



Coop: A Year of Poultry, Pigs, and Parenting

Michael Perry

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"Beneath the flannel surface of this deer-hunting, truck-loving Badger is the soul of a poet."

—*Chicago Tribune*

You'll find in this book a slender silver cord of smart contemplation about meaning and purpose."

—*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

"He's the real thing."

—*USA Today*

Coop: A Year of Poultry, Pigs, and Parenting Details

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Author : Michael Perry

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From Reader Review Coop: A Year of Poultry, Pigs, and Parenting for online ebook

Res says

Should have known that just because I enjoyed *Little Heathens*, a farm memoir from the Depression, in no way predicted that I would enjoy a farm memoir from today.

The scene that cemented my decision to stop reading was the one where the author is acknowledging that his wife has reason on her side when she suggests borrowing a power wood-splitter so he can focus on his paying work, while going on splitting wood by hand. It's all postmodern postmacho -- there's no arguing that the manly way is the superior way; quite the opposite, in fact -- but it still assumes that I've sat down, opened an ebook, and said to Michael Perry, "Tell me allll about being a man, because being a man is something that's really interesting to me."

jess says

I never keep track of where my recommendations come from and my to-read list is, well, I won't finish it in this lifetime. So I have no idea why I picked this book up. It's reasonable to guess, however, that it's because it is a sort of modern back-to-the-land fumbling memoir of the author, his wife, their young daughter and the baby-on-the-way moving out of the city to an old family farm. It's not a how-to book. It's a memoir, and his farming experiences are mostly just context for Perry's meander down memory lane. This book is really about family and rural America. It's about the author's experiences in a small town, growing up on a farm himself, being part of a large family, his parents taking on a lengthy parade of special needs foster kids, being raised in a secretive fundamentalist Christian sect (which is weird, but not evil like it sounds), the community that surrounds all those going-on's of life, and balancing work, family, and farm. This book took me way too long to get through. My initial goal was to finish it in a week, but it dragged into two and then two and now it's taken me a full week to write the review.

The slaughter of the pigs and meat birds is less graphic and more poetic than that in *Farm City*, but the sentiments are the same - pigs are smart, challenging, and funny, but a lot more work than expected and the fresh bacon is unbelievable. I will not raise pigs in my backyard, though! Perry has a lot of guilt about the balance of his career and his farm's workload, and he really struggles with going on the road for a book tour and leaving his wife alone with two kids to care for, homeschooling, and a farm that needs tending. His wife is very capable, a farm girl herself, and manages just fine without him thank you very much. The idea to go back to the farm was a shared dream, the animals were his project, and the crops were almost entirely hers. This was a little disappointing to me, since the end result is that the book has not much about the plants, and plants are the most interesting things to me. The chicken stories, however, are lovely. Raising the chicks into ugly pullets into handsome hens, and his daughter's love for the most "special" chicken, the heartbreak when a laying hen passes away, and all of the love and loss and laughter of having laying hens and their strong personalities around - these are eggs-actly why I read these kinds of books, man.

When I settled down with this book, it was easy to read 100 pages quickly, but I had a hard time getting excited about setting aside the time, and that is the crux of this book for me. It was really good to read, but hard to get fired up about meandering *Small Town / Rural Life* prose. Perry's writing style is charming and earnest. His anecdotes and meditations are sincere and thoughtful. His love for his daughters touches my

secret parenthood nerve. When he talks about his father in those dry, secret ways that only the best kind of man can talk about loving his daddy, my heart clenches up in my throat. There is something about the quiet sentimental emotional life of rural masculinity that I find so charming, and in *Coop*, it's paired with a modern man's sense of intellectualism and responsibility.

Book Concierge says

This is the third of Michael Perry's memoirs that I've read. In this volume he relates the early years of his marriage and efforts to establish his small family on a farmstead in Northern Wisconsin – growing much of their own food by raising chickens and pigs, and planting a good-size vegetable garden.

Perry is a humorist and a philosopher. His memoirs aren't particularly linear, though they are revealed in a fair approximation of chronological order. He goes off on tangents, ruminating about the joys and difficulties of the rural life he's chosen. He can be hilariously funny, especially when poking fun at himself and his efforts to provide for his family as a farmer. He doesn't sugarcoat the life of a farmer, but he elevates it, as when he relates his daughter's sheer joy at holding that first, still-warm, brown egg from their own chickens, or recalling a father and son stopping to enjoy the stars on their way back to the house from the barn.

His descriptions on the growth and development of his children are priceless. Who can possibly out-think a six-year-old determined to get a horse? Or reason with a teething infant? Or answer those **BIG** questions that would stump any genius?

Just as with his other works, I find myself laughing out loud, and also crying in empathy. I hope he keeps writing for a long time. (His daughters may think otherwise, but I am really looking forward to hearing about his years as the father of teenage girls...)

Tamara Taylor says

I was disappointed that I didn't enjoy this book more than I did but in all fairness I believe my expectations were quite high. Parenting, poultry, pigs...that is right up my alley! Humour, even better! I was excited to delve into this novel and was disappointed when it didn't deliver. While Perry has a whimsical way of describing his day to day life as father, husband, writer and fledgling farmer, I found his experience unremarkable and his writing style not "enough" to overcome that. Two pigs, a handful of chickens and a guinea pig do not necessarily bestow a person the experience and expertise to spout philosophically about farming. Perhaps I am just jaded because he openly admits that he uses his farming "chores" (2 pigs? come on!) to escape his duties in the household and with his newborn daughter Jane. When his father needs help with haying he sends his wife, 6 year old Amy and newborn Jane to help while he stays home to write. This kind of responsibility-shirkage does nothing but piss off a hard-working farm woman like myself to the tune of summoning up all the junk-kicking vibes I can muster and sending them lazer-beam-style in Perry's general direction.

Suzka says

I couldn't decide between four and five stars, so I flipped a coin, which landed on its edge. This is at least a

4.5 star read. *Coop* was one of those books which unfolds itself quietly but solidly. Though it was not a compelling page-turner, it held me kinda how thoughtful reflecting on my own life holds me. (Note: you do not need to have embarked upon a chicken-raising journey to appreciate this, though it certainly does not hurt.) The world in which this author lives (as it is a memoir, not fiction) is the antithesis of faaaaaabulousness, which I thoroughly appreciate. It often felt like I was sneaking peeks into his beautifully written personal journal. That his children will have such a full account of this slice of their lives is a treat; that the rest of us get to share it is icing on the cake.

I started out with a three small Post-it notes marking pages which held passages that particularly sang. (I'm getting tired of forgetting where those tasty nuggets are when I read.) As I progressed to the end, I found myself tearing them into smaller and smaller strips of Post-it to mark my favorite snippets. Here are a few. One might be somewhat of a spoiler, but not squarely so:

"But what really keeps circling my head was the phrase Leah used to describe the landmarks of our child: *the constellation of baby*. What a gorgeous image - the unborn infant afloat in the universe of mother, identifiable but unknowable." (p. 39)

"I got religion in the third grade, and jeepers, did I need it. The devil was in me, and Hardy Biesterveld wasn't helping." (p. 51)

"[The pheasant who frequents the yard:] sports a glorious set of head feathers: blood-splash eye patch, bottle-green Batman cowl, a pristine white collar. The colors startle the eye, bright in the brown weeds like scraps of birthday balloon." (p. 113)

"Today a dog bit me grievously upon the ass. I apologize for the salty talk, but it was a galvanic moment. I was wrestling a pig at the time. So - two firsts in one day." (p. 183)

"Remember that electric fence I hooked up for the pigpen? I did the whole thing exactly right - spaced and sank three grounding rods instead of settling for just one, linked them together, and clamped (rather than just wrapping) the wire as indicated...a month passed before I went to open the shed door and discovered that I had run the ground wire in such a way that the door couldn't slide on its rails without cutting the wire in two. If life was a state fair, I'd have a giant shoe box full of green ribbons embossed with the word PARTICIPANT." (p. 203)

[At a funeral:] "there are a lot of old farmers who can't bear to look in the casket, and you see these sunburned old dogs approach my brother and break down weeping as they take his hand or wrap him in their bearish arms, and maybe they are wearing big belt buckles or unmodish jeans or have their sparse hair Brylcreemed in the style of a '60s trucker, but it strikes me again how much we miss if we rely wholly on poets to parse the tender center of the human heart." (p. 273)

That last one, and the image of the birthday balloon in the weeds, are my favorite.

Joan Colby says

A substantial step up from the typical rural life memoir. Perry's self deprecating humor is salted with observations that are never, as he puts it, "prettied up." During the course of this, his third memoir, he has moved with his wife and young stepdaughter to his mother-in-laws former farm in northern Wisconsin. Both

Perry and his wife grew up on Wisconsin farms, he as a member of a large Christian fundamentalist family which eschewed TV and radio, but fostered a love of books along with numerous coming and going children, some disabled, others troubled. Perry is no longer a believer in the small sect he refers to as The Truth, but he respects his parents engagement. He and Anneliese expect their first child together and the home birth they plan goes swimmingly (in a birthing pool). Perry is pragmatic about his involvement in farming—the amusing pigs become ham and bacon, the meat chickens to go market, the layers are attacked by dogs or fishers, and Perry’s ongoing goal to complete their chicken coop is finally attained. I intend to read Perry’s earlier memoirs. He’s a fine writer whose work appears in journals such as Esquire, the New York Times Magazine, Utne Review and others.

Mandy says

I admit, I stopped reading around page 265. I just didn't care about hay and the best kind and how it is baled.

I skipped to the last chapter and skimmed it and probably would have enjoyed it more if I had felt like reading it as it focused more on his belief's and faith.

This book is about Michael Perry's life. He shares things about his present life and then it will bring back a memory and he digresses a bit and then becomes a bit discursive (which I don't mind, I love discursive people) and then will end the section with a meaningful thought, something to ponder. I really enjoyed hearing about his personal life and growing up. He lost me when he started talking about farming and plowing and gardening, etc... Just not my interest.

Very well written, very intelligent man, great story teller.

Dave Gaston says

As a convenient metaphor, Michael Perry kinda pushes this memoir out like an egg. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with it. As we have come to expect from Perry, it has the same folksy charm and the same exquisite descriptions of both land and life. Still, it felt a little more like an excellent journal and a little less like a memoir. There are Wisconsin chestnuts to be had, but he also threw me for a loop. This is the first Perry book (that I have read) that introduces us to his faith. His two previous memoirs only hint at his woodsy, bible thumping ways. I’m not opposed to a man’s declaration-- I just didn't see it coming. If you have not read Perry, I would not start here. Double back and read (or listen to) the author’s early stuff. Both “Population 485” and “Visiting Tom” capture an authentic slice of rural Americana.

M. Sarki says

<https://msarki.tumblr.com/post/163209...>

Reluctantly, even shamefully, I will admit that often the book felt tiresome. Perry’s old self-deprecating humor however was skillfully interlaced between fits and starts of the author creating a working farm in midst of his learning to become a husband, father, and respected writer of the first rank. But you won’t find Perry bragging about any of his accomplishments, only the sometimes hilarious reporting of his daily grind

at being the best he can muster on every front. Given that his previous memoir titled *Truck: A Love Story* continued his elaboration on a life Michael Perry has been documenting now for several years, the complete rebuilding of his favored International in that previous book interested me little as things mechanical are not my cup of tea. But his progressive story throughout that book remained for me quite interesting. And in *Coop: A Year of Poultry, Pigs, and Parenting* he manages again to record a life that novels are made of. He could not have made this story up. The tragedies that occur are monumental in his retelling of them. The gratitude he expresses for what he has is relentless. And that is what also feels a bit tiresome at times. How can a person be this good?

But when Perry writes for example of the surprise death of his brother Jed's young son it all comes crashing in on me. The wrongfulness of my criticism becomes ridiculous. There has never been a novel or memoir that affected me as the specific *Chapter Eight* did. Immediately I was made an emotional wreck, even in the realization that my heart was still in good hands with Michael Perry guiding me. My attempts to convey to my wife just what I had read brought me almost to my knees with grief as I babbled on as a broken invalid in my caving-in and near destruction. And as much as I actually cried over his wonderful poetic prose the words were never sentimental in the disgusting degree we as readers are generally subjected to in regards to pain and loss. The words resound in their beauty and grace. I cannot get his prose from off my plate. And to swallow it whole would be courageous, but for me at least, that will have to wait. I am a chicken at best, running out of time, and still not the man I want to be.

Michael Perry's personal story continues to unfold as the sometimes haphazard events occur among his friends and family. All the while, in the midst of it all, Perry writes and works toward a literary mastery rarely observed in what generally gets published today. Cheers again for Michael Perry.

Amy says

I absolutely loved this book. The farming aspects of it are my foundation, as well. After I read him describing the process of milking, I stopped and just sat there holding my book. This event happened twice a day on our farm. My parents farmed for 41 years, and it went back over 100 years through my grandparents and great-grandparents on our farm, and my great-great grandparents who came from Germany and settled on the farm up the road. So many things in this book are ingrained in me, and I am so glad that Mike was able to write these events that farmers do every day in such an eloquent way that those who do it, did it, want to do it, and have never been on a farm can see a slice of what his, and my life, was like. Absolutely wonderful.

Diane Yannick says

Michael Perry has written a trio of memoirs but this is the first one that I've read. I'm glad I did even though his meandering style sometimes annoyed me. Yet, he was able to set a pastoral Wisconsin scene that drew me into his world. I saw Shake 'n Bake, his special needs chicken and actually cared about her well being. I knew more about his attempts to construct a chicken coop than I ever wanted to know. I shared (well, not really) his pride when his wife learned to blow her nose without a hanky. I was amused by the male perspective of his daughter's home birth--baby Jane (a colicky one for sure). His relationship with his home-schooled 6 year old stepdaughter Amy, was crafted using just the right details and anecdotes. I appreciated Michael and Anneliese's efforts to live off the land and bring new life into her grandmother's farm. Yeah,

there were more slaughtering scenes than I needed but how can I criticize that when the title of the book told me exactly what was in store. Anneliese shouldered much of the day to day farming responsibility as Michael is away from home 100 days a year with his author gigs. There's no wonder she doesn't have that light in her eyes that her husband yearns for. This mother/wife/farmer/home-schooler is in dire need of an assistant who can help her can that sauerkraut to eat with the pig (Poor Wilbur) she helped butcher. BTW, don't name an animal you're going to slaughter, guys. I don't like it.

I got tired of the childhood/present day transitions. I see how he wanted to integrate his fundamentalist Christian, huge family values into his memoir. I realize that his upbringing influenced who he became but I wish he had told the stories separately. I WAS glad to read a memoir that did not rely on traumatic family events to drive the story. His self-deprecating humor kept me from deciding that he was pompous. I loved his invented word "slumpage." You do what's asked but the body slumpage kind of ruins it.

Siv30 says

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Maicie says

My folks sold the dairy farm in Wisconsin when I was quite little. What little memories I have of the time came from stories told by my father's large brood of siblings. Over the years, my husband and I idealized these stories to the point where we thought it would be a grand idea to buy thirty-five acres and get back to the living land. Like the author, we were hit square in the backside with some fundamental reality. Animals bite! and poop! and eat! Weeds beat out grass every single time! You still have to shovel snow even if there are no sidewalks! The %\$#@ pizza place won't deliver this far!

I enjoyed reading about Michael Perry's adventures on his small farm. Sweet, funny and, at times, heart breaking, the author utopianizes (is that a word?) his corner of the world with a good measure of grit. Highly recommend.

Melody says

This review is going to be more about my failure as a reader than it is about Perry's success as a writer. He's warm and honest and loving and straight-laced and, well, annoying in his rectitude. He comes from a family that took in numberless foster children, many of whom died agonizing deaths. He hearkens back to his childhood with love and reverence, and he strives to raise his own children properly. He apologizes in advance for profanity (which at its worst, comprises "ass" for buttocks). He loves his wife with a tenderness not often found in modern literature. And still, he gives me a pain.

That being said, this is a rare and beautiful memoir- both honest and rigorous and frequently hilarious. I don't know why I'm all knee-jerky about his pious tone, but I am. Still, I have got to recommend this book, and recommend it wholeheartedly.

Cheryl says

I've loved everything else that this author has written. This memoir/autobiography is one of the few I've not read until now because I've been saving it for a treat.

Michael Perry is a tiny bit like a Wisconsin Garrison Keillor, with less of an ego. In fact, by the time he wrote his most recent book, *Montaigne in Barn Boots: An Amateur Ambles Through Philosophy*, he realized he needed to address his addiction to self-deprecation. But that's only one bit of that work, his most mature and thoughtful to date.

In this book, I expect to see plenty of warmth, anxiety, love, slapstick, philosophy, and maybe a tiny bit of righteousness as he navigates a new adventure in his life, with his new wife and her daughter, his "given daughter."

... Well, I finished, and enjoyed it just about as much as I thought I would. I won't diss ppl who consider it unfocused or too poetical, but I love Mike's rambles and his variety of ideas, and his language.

Some things I love are direct from his family. For example, his given daughter, Amy, has been moved around several times. On a visit to one of her previous houses, she "looks up cheerily and says, 'This is one of my hometowns!'"

"Spinning a living from typing and talking and traveling is all well and good, but I can tell you the project does not bear up under scrutiny at 2:00 a.m. and ten below. Especially if you've just burned six hours and two pots of coffee tweaking a sentence fragment that holds together like cheese crumbles. Calvin Coolidge notwithstanding, sometimes persistence is just a batty cat slapping at a mirror."

New picturebook to check out: *Beetle McGrady Eats Bugs!*.

