



## Fields and Fencelines: Stories of Life on a Family Farm

**Mark E. Hillenbrand**

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*Each story is related with intimate detail, often humorous and always loaded with charming imagery.*

In his detailed memoir *Fields and Fencelines*, Mark E. Hillenbrand shares anecdotes from his lively, love-filled childhood growing up on a self-sufficient family farm in Saskatchewan, Canada.

When Hillenbrand's grandparents emigrated from Germany to Canada in the 1930s, they worked hard on their land without electricity or running water. By the time Hillenbrand himself was born, the 960 acres were home to numerous cows, chickens, turkeys, dogs, cats, bees, and wild animals that sometimes tormented the domesticated ones. Making a living mostly by selling cattle to slaughterhouses, the family—including young Hillenbrand and his three sisters—worked on the farm day in and day out with extraordinary results.

Sectioned into chapters that each focus on a specific theme or characteristic of the farm, the book explores Hillenbrand's adventurous and free-spirited childhood, which was marked not only by work but by hiking and camping, floating rafts on melting ice puddles, breeding rabbits for money, and participating in 4-H. His richly diverse experiences on the farm—helping moody cows give birth, weeding the garden for hours on end, logging with his father—provided Hillenbrand with the opportunities to develop resourcefulness, confidence, and a sense of wonder at nature's flora and fauna.

The memoir moves from topic to topic effortlessly and covers each compelling subject thoroughly without being overwhelming or using too much farming jargon. It is told through Hillenbrand's perspective as a child in awe of his family's unique circumstances, and all the joy and imagination of a child is paired with the educated hindsight of a memoirist looking back. The anecdotes are memorable, as when a giant bull was refused by the slaughterhouse because he was too big and Hillenbrand's father walked him back to the truck, leading him by the ring in his nose. Each story is related with intimate detail, often humorous and always loaded with charming imagery.

Children of farmers or those who otherwise grew up in rural areas will recognize the innovation required to get work done and to have as much fun as possible in the meantime. While Hillenbrand went on to become a tree planter—grueling work that he was capable of because of his experiences on the farm—before becoming a lawyer instead of following in his father's footsteps, *Fields and Fencelines* reveals that he looks on his childhood very fondly.

This entertaining memoir's reminiscences stick in the mind and bring awareness to both the intensity of farm work and the significance of the environment on the living beings within it.

AIMEE JODOIN (February 20, 2019)

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