Clarion Review

Historical

Hoof Prints in the Snow
Jim Hawley
Xlibris
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Five Stars (out of Five)

In *Hoof Prints in the Snow*, Jim Hawley, a horse rancher and emergency-room physician, presents a low-key, charming tale of a life spent in the ranching community of Wheatland, Wyoming, where the author lives. His narrator, country doctor Jim Holland, is "new" to the area, having lived there for only six years, but his love for this small town, "where the Laramie Mountains transition to the great high plains," undoubtedly reflects the author's own feelings for the place. Simple but evocative, Hawley's descriptions bring the locale and its characters to life as he tells the story of Lucy Johansson Morgan, one of Dr. Holland's patients, and her family.

A small town in the southeast corner of the state, where temperatures can reach the low hundreds in the summer and negative double digits in the winter, Wheatland is a place where waitresses call everyone "hon," and comments like "kinda hot for July" and "kinda cold for December" are as ubiquitous as cowboy hats and coffee. Hawley makes his readers feel at home. His dialogue is realistic and down-to-earth, revealing far more about the characters than detailed descriptions could. These are good, hard-working people, and Hawley makes it easy to feel invested in their lives.

Lucy is a "character" in the truest sense of the word. When Dr. Holland first meets her, she is an elderly woman, with short red hair whose "roots [belie] a dye job." She has lived in the area all her life, and Dr. Holland finds himself inexplicably drawn to her. The story he narrates is compiled from what he learns about her from "townspeople, the ranchers in the surrounding countryside, local history, local legend, and Lucy Morgan herself." Lucy is a strong, determined woman, and her life is not an easy one. Dr. Holland relates her story from her birth in the 1920s through her marriage as a teen, the births and lives of her children, and the death of her husband. There are forays into her husband's service in Italy during World War II and her son's time in the army in Vietnam. Hawley provides just enough compelling detail to evoke a true sense of

the men's experiences. Although short, the war stories are convincingly told, and each is important in the way it influences Lucy's life.

Hoof Prints in the Snow is not an earth-shattering story, yet it is a captivating, well-written tale. Hawley's talent for understatement works extremely well here. This slim volume is exactly what the doctor himself might order for a cozy read on a winter's night. It can be read straight through in a single sitting, and its heartfelt account of the "trials and victories…gains and losses" of the indomitable Lucy Morgan is certain to please.

Cheryl Hibbard