



Scoop: Notes from a Small Ice Cream Shop

Jeff Miller

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Self-deprecating humor and refreshing characterizations of townsfolk give hope that the American Dream is still alive and well.

If it isn't possible to drop everything, hop in the car, and drive to remote Hayward, Wisconsin, to stay at the McCormick House Inn and sample a scoop of Almost Sinful ice cream at West's Hayward Dairy, then, by all means, read Jeff Miller's engaging tale of life in the North Woods, *Scoop: Notes from a Small Ice Cream Shop*. His story of change and challenge is as stimulating and heartwarming as a cup of his fresh Italian espresso. "Life," Miller says, "has always been about fate and timing—alignment of opportunities and decisions made in light of those opportunities."

The memoir chronicles Miller's move with longtime British partner Dean from fashionable London to backwater Hayward, where "provided you looked for it, there was always a Norman Rockwell moment just around the corner." Miller and Dean trade walks in Kensington Gardens for bird-sized mosquitoes; the London arts scene for Friday fish fries; sushi for fried cheese curds; and cashmere sweaters for plaid flannel shirts. But they also exchange the urban corporate rat race for bucolic beauty and the joy of being one's own boss. They acquire Hayward's aging dairy and dilapidated lumber baron's mansion and transform them into thriving businesses. *Scoop* relates the couple's first four seasons in their new hometown.

Miller's writing style blends the best of Calvin Trillin's travelogues and Bill Bryson's wit. His gift for describing detail brings the town and its history to life, from the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum, to comical lawnmower races, to the "Birkie," the largest cross-country ski marathon in the country. Miller's account is peppered with fun facts, and his characterizations of townsfolk are so endearing that readers will be tempted to set places at their own Thanksgiving tables for Buck, Bruce, Little Bob, and Vivian.

Miller writes with refreshing candor. "On so many levels, the move to Wisconsin to make ice cream was a poorly conceived if not desperate attempt to address some midlife crisis," he admits. And his humor is often self-deprecating: "The world knows only two types of gay couples—those who own B&Bs and those who haven't found the right property."

Jeff Miller's charming story gives us hope that the elusive American Dream is alive and well, available to any kindhearted soul brave enough to take a chance and step into the unknown.

NANCY WALKER (Fall 2014)

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