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## Evolution of a Field Biologist

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## EVOLUTION OF A FIELD BIOLOGIST

*My Double Life: Memoirs of a Naturalist.* Frances Hamerstrom. 1994. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison. 316 pages. \$34.95 (cloth), \$16.95 (paper).

In *My Double Life*, biologist Frances Hamerstrom reveals her evolution from an affluent childhood in early 1900s Boston to a rugged and spirited field biologist. She writes in first person with short, easy-reading chapters about her life, generally in chronological order from childhood to present. The anecdotes are concise, witty, and spiced with humor in her characteristic, blissful confidence. There are many unique black-and-white photographs reproduced, as well as pen-and-ink illustrations mostly by her artist-daughter, Elva Hamerstrom Paulson. Half of the book's chapters are borrowed from earlier works, in particular her award-winning *Strictly for the Chickens* (1980). This new book complements several more-or-less autobiographic works by presenting Hamerstrom's childhood adventures and exploits. Toward its closing, the book finds her in her mid-80s exploring primitive worlds by travelling with Pygmies and Indians in Africa and South America.

A third of this book details her early years and how they fortified her, which she admits was difficult to reveal. Her highly structured, Boston childhood demanded stereotypic female behavior that would prepare her as an international hostess. This conflicted with her inquisitive and creative outdoor mind, making her a very unhappy, lonely, and rebellious child. She attempted to communicate with her parents and other adults, but the old attitude of "children should be seen and not heard" prevailed, so she developed a mistrust of adults, some of which persisted into her own adulthood. Her liberation was rebelling silently against most family rules, being truly self-reliant, and trusting only her own instincts. Tactics she used to navigate around her family standards were most unusual. For example, her family did not approve of her visiting the Boston Museum of Natural History, but one time her governess took her there after visiting a dentist's office near the museum. She was so overwhelmed by the museum, especially its insect collection, that she devised a gutsy scheme to return: she would use a pencil between two teeth close to the gum "... pushing hard, I rolled the pencil. Blood came! I kept rotating the pencil between my fingers and looked again. More blood ..." She showed her father the "toothache" and he promptly ordered her governess to take her to the dentist. The stop after the dentist was the museum; she had succeeded in her quest. Many examples of such youthful boldness and fortitude are

found in this book, behaviors and experiences that nurtured her into a tough, tenacious woman and destined her to be a successful and renowned field biologist.

This childhood prepared her for the life she cherished, with her beloved, late husband, Frederick ("Hammy") in the wilds of central Wisconsin, and in particular with its prairie chickens, the study and conservation of which the Hamerstoms are famous for. The rest of the book mostly dwells on the Hamerstoms' lives as prairie chicken biologists. There is a touching chapter about how the Hamerstoms and a fellow student at the University of Wisconsin secretly moved Professor Aldo Leopold from a cramped, dark office into a spacious, well-lit office that remained his.

Toward the end of the book, it becomes apparent that times were not easy in the mid-1900s for a female biologist, an era when society put a woman in a home with children and household chores. Fran not only took care of a home, children, and household chores, but she also was a companion, assistant field biologist, active falconer, and wife to her husband, and a superb field biologist in her own right, publishing classic early works on raptor ecology.

I could readily relate to some portions of this book because of my own experiences as a public servant in resource conservation. Four chapters stress how the public, at times, will scrutinize its servants, such as Hamerstoms experienced during the "Prairie Chicken War." The Hamerstoms had developed a management plan to save the prairie chicken from extinction near Necedah, in central Wisconsin, and local people were extremely upset about the plan. This section of the book gives strength to persons in analogous roles, even though we all "... must have periods of great strain ...". I also related to Hamerstoms' "Rule of thirds," a simple rule for those who immerse themselves in field work but need to survive accompanying bureaucracy. Leopold, the Hamerstoms' graduate advisor, first stated this rule when he told them, "You can satisfy the requirements in one third of your time." Hamerstoms pondered this message and developed the following: spend one third of your time on bureaucratic red tape, another third doing what is wanted of you and what you want to do, and the last third doing exactly what you please.

The "adult world" once again disillusioned Fran later in life when she tried to publish her first scientific manuscript, a final, important step she needed to prove herself as a field biologist. Instead of getting full credit for serving as principal investigator and senior author of *The Great Horned Owl and its Prey in North Central United States*, the classic monograph was coauthored by her and her husband, with Paul Errington as senior author.

She was once again disenchanted by "adults" in trying to prove herself, this time not as a maturing child, but as a professional, woman field biologist.

Her concluding chapter will once again cause the reader to realize how incredibly strong this woman is, and of her concerns and solutions for this wonderful, but stressed, world. Anyone who knows or knows of Fran or is engaged in field biology would enjoy her memoirs, a very revealing book about how a most unique woman evolved from a child, schooled as an "international hostess," but who developed into a renowned field biologist ... a double life indeed.—*Karen A. Smith, Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge, RR #2 Box 98, Kenmare, ND 58746.*