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## Review of *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest* Collected and edited by Will Fellows

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He sees fear, he senses despair, he sees  
 facing family,  
 friends and life of such blackness that he  
 cannot  
 comprehend all of the changes it will  
 bring.

So many hopeless young men left in the  
 sickening despair  
 that is homophobic America have pulled  
 the trigger,  
 tied the knot, swallowed the pill, smashed  
 into a tree,  
 breathed the gas, or they have swum off  
 into the, finally,  
 welcoming current of resignation.

He must be retaught his loveliness.

Ed then explained that Jeremiah lives “out there” in rural Missouri. I told Ed I would give my review copy of *Farm Boys* to him so he could give it to Jeremiah. I’m talking about utility here and what more useful thing can a book do than save a man from suicide?

What will Jeremiah find in the book?

First, he will find that he is not alone. The men interviewed in *Farm Boys* have felt what he feels—the same joy, the same despair, the same confusion, the same sudden enlightenment. They have known the same pain and most of them have survived it. He can survive it, too. These men are his role models.

Second, he will be made aware of a tradition. The book is set up in three parts with a historical overview in each: Part 1, “Coming of Age Before the Mid-1960s”; Part 2, “Coming of Age Between the Mid-1960s and Mid-1970s”; Part 3, “Coming of Age Between the Mid-1970s and Mid-1980s.” You make the point, Will, that with improved communications, transportation, and education, the lives of gay men have improved since 1900. The interviews themselves prove the point.

Third, he will learn survival strategies. Some of these men escaped to cities, the traditional way to survive, but others have remained on the farm or, having tried the city

*Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest.* Collected and edited by Will Fellows. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. Farming glossary. xxix + 316 pp. \$27.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

Dear Will Fellows:

Thank you for collecting and editing *Farm Boys*. I have already found a use for it. Today, in one of my classes, a student, Ed Grimes, read a poem he had written. I have asked Ed if I can use some of it here:

Jeremiah, twenty-two years old, great  
 looking, great  
 personality, yet he is so damn alone,  
 trying to bust  
 out of the prison which is his closet of  
 sexuality.

and disliked it, returned to the farm and are practicing farming. Some of these farmers have partners who farm with them. Gay men do not need to face isolation and loneliness in the 1990s even in rural settings. People will often accept you as part of the community, especially if you were born there and were part of the community to begin with.

Fourth, he will discover that his sexuality is part of the same nature that surrounds him. As one of the men interviewed in this book says, "There are some bulls who have no interest in fertilizing cows. It is simply the way things are." As another says, "It is how God made us."

Fifth, Jeremiah might discover that love is possible. Some of the men in this book have found companionship, domesticity, commitment, shared values, understanding, a life together. He might find these, too. In fact, they will probably be easier to find in the country than the city. Many men leave San Francisco and New York and Los Angeles because they can't find love there. And then they find it where it was all the time, back home.

Finally, Jeremiah might rediscover his loneliness through this lovely book. He might discover self-worth, affirmation, useful labor (farming), and hope. He might be encouraged to go on.

Thank you, Will, for producing this book.

John

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