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Review of *Feels Like Far: A Rancher's Life on the Great Plains* By Linda Hasselstrom

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Feels Like Far: A Rancher's Life on the Great Plains. By Linda Hasselstrom. New York: The Lyons Press, 1999. Illustrations, acknowledgments. 233 pp. \$22.95 cloth, \$13.00 paper.

Feels Like Far is a poignant autobiography. Linda Hasselstrom observes like a naturalist,

contemplates like a philosopher, and writes like a poet as she pursues her central question: "Death washed away the solid bedrock of my life as I drove back and forth across the plains this year. . . . Are these changes in my life vortical growth? Or the destructive confusion of a prairie twister?" Flashbacks and reflections weave past and present together.

As she ponders her husband's death, her father's aging and death, her mother's decline, her best friend's death, her move from her ranch to Cheyenne, and the meaning of her own life, she relies on her deep prairie roots for physical strength and spiritual insight. She describes the prairie as looking like "mountain lions sunning," a place where she feels safer at night than in her house. She has learned how to tell weather by the color of the sky and the direction of clouds, to recognize an approaching storm by the swarming of birds. Alone or with others, Linda Hasselstrom can round up and brand cattle, track badgers, name prairie flowers, build windbreaks, extinguish prairie fires, cope with flooded barns.

One of the book's most incredible incidents tells of a winter night when she left her pickup to join a buffalo herd. She was "inside earth's lungs," "feeling a holiness I didn't understand." As she contemplated the animals' nature and size, she began to feel serene as they surrounded her. Ironically, she had more difficulty digging her pickup out of a snowbank than she did mingling with the herd.

Although the nighthawk has been Hasselstrom's favorite bird since childhood, she has seen the rare hawk spiral just twice. "Hundreds of birds flying in circles. Together they formed a whirling shaft mounting the air. . . . Hundreds of wings whipped the air. . . . The breath pouring into my lungs was power charged." Hasselstrom links the hawk spiral to nature's cycles and claims it for her metaphor.

This book will engage Hasselstrom's first-time readers and readers already acquainted with *Going Over East*, *Windbreak*, and *Land Circles*. The second group will recognize some familiar stories in fresh perspectives. The com-

bined stories will become "stories spiraling like hawks at play [that] define the history of any landscape, any people." When readers finish *Feels Like Far*, they will see and feel connected to Hasselstrom's "vortical growth."

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