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Review of *Prairie Silence: A Memoir* By Melanie Hoffert.

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strangers seated together on an airplane, the narrator reports never fretting over whether to come out as gay. The eyebrow raiser is this: "I'm originally from North Dakota."

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Prairie Silence: A Memoir. By Melanie Hoffert.
Boston: Beacon Press, 2013. 238 pp. \$24.95.

Melanie Hoffert's memoir on growing up gay in rural North Dakota is refreshingly devoid of the clichéd finger-wagging that marks much discourse on the subject. The denizens of Dakota are not depicted as abject bigots or people in need of diversity training. Hoffert's reluctance to "come out" to family, friends, and former neighbors of her small town is something she ultimately pins on herself, or on something she calls "prairie silence." At times this phenomenon seems salutary, part of the "natural" relation of people to profoundly open spaces; at times "prairie silence" seems to be an affliction depriving people of entry into their "deepest feelings." Anyone who has lived here for any length of time will recognize this emotional remoteness. Anyone who has been gay here has had to make some kind of peace with it. Or leave.

This memoir, however, is sweet and lyrical. Among its gifts are hyperbolic figures of speech (e.g., "*Wait, wait. What?* I shook my head like a cartoon character flattened by falling off of a cliff, who now needed to inflate my body, starting with my head"). There's also a real prairie pleasure in the author's ability to poke fun at herself, and at the urban culture to which she has fled. The cadences of speech seem about right, too. Seeing that her farmer father is intent on demolishing a century-old but nonfunctional barn, the narrator can only abjectly point out that "Pottery Barn would kill for the wood." Ripostes Dad: "They can come and get it then." Hoffert is likewise capable of effective linguistic economy. Recalling the sometimes awkward conversations between