



Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression

By Mildred Armstrong Kalish

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I tell of a time, a place, and a way of life long gone. For many years I have had the urge to describe that treasure trove, lest it vanish forever. So, partly in response to the basic human instinct to share feelings and experiences, and partly for the sheer joy and excitement of it all, I report on my early life. It was quite a romp.

So begins Mildred Kalish's story of growing up on her grandparents' Iowa farm during the depths of the Great Depression. With her father banished from the household for mysterious transgressions, five-year-old Mildred and her family could easily have been overwhelmed by the challenge of simply trying to survive. This, however, is not a tale of suffering.

Kalish counts herself among the lucky of that era. She had caring grandparents who possessed—and valiantly tried to impose—all the pioneer virtues of their forebears, teachers who inspired and befriended her, and a barnyard full of animals ready to be tamed and loved. She and her siblings and their cousins from the farm across the way played as hard as they worked, running barefoot through the fields, as free and wild as they dared.

Filled with recipes and how-tos for everything from catching and skinning a rabbit to preparing homemade skin and hair beautifiers, apple cream pie, and the world's best head cheese (start by scrubbing the head of the pig until it is pink and clean), Little Heathens portrays a world of hardship and hard work tempered by simple rewards. There was the unsurpassed flavor of tender new dandelion greens harvested as soon as the snow melted; the taste of crystal clear marble-sized balls of honey robbed from a bumblebee nest; the sweet smell from the body of a lamb sleeping on sun-warmed grass; and the magical quality of oat shocking under the light of a full harvest moon.

Little Heathens offers a loving but realistic portrait of a “hearty-handshake Methodist” family that gave its members a remarkable legacy of kinship, kindness, and remembered pleasures. Recounted in a luminous narrative filled with tenderness and humor, Kalish’s memoir of her childhood shows how the

right stuff can make even the bleakest of times seem like “quite a romp.”

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Kalish's memoir of her Iowa childhood, set against the backdrop of the Depression, captures a vanished way of traditional living and a specific moment in American history in a story both illuminating and memorable. Kalish lived with her siblings, mother and grandparents—seven in all—both in a town home and, in warmer weather, out on a farm. The lifestyle was frugal in the extreme: "The only things my grandparents spent money on were tea, coffee, sugar, salt, white flour, cloth and kerosene." But in spite of the austere conditions, Kalish's memories are mostly happy ones: keeping the farm and home going, caring for animals, cooking elaborate multi-course meals and washing the large family's laundry once a week, by hand. Here, too, are stories of gossiping in the kitchen, digging a hole to China with the "Big Kids" and making head cheese at butchering time. Kalish skillfully rises above bitterness and sentiment, giving her memoir a clear-eyed narrative voice that puts to fine use a lifetime of careful observation: "Observing the abundance of life around us was just so naturally a part of our days on the farm that it became a habit." Simple, detailed and honest, this is a refreshing and informative read for anyone interested in the struggles of average Americans in the thick of the Great Depression.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

One of the most endearing qualities of octogenarian Mildred Armstrong Kalish's *Little Heathens* is that it runs counter to what the memoir, sadly, has too frequently become—self-indulgent, self-promoting gossip. Despite circumstances that could easily have left her embittered, Kalish, a retired English professor, recalls her formative years fondly. Through simple, honest prose punctuated with "her old pagan rhythms" (*New York Times Book Review*) and a host of memorable examples, Kalish performs her greatest feat, which is to make some of us under 80 just the slightest bit envious—crazy to say, but such is human nature—that we never experienced the Depression-era challenges and triumphs so lovingly recounted.

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From [Booklist](#)

This unpretentious yet deeply intelligent memoir of growing up on a central Iowa farm in the throes of the Great Depression radiates the joy of a vanished way of life as Kalish recounts what appear to contemporary eyes as unendurable deprivations. Those who share Kalish's midwestern farm background will immediately identify with her recollections of winter nights spent under layers of quilts in unheated bedrooms. Others for whom agrarian life is uncharted territory will learn both the harsh rigors of days governed by unforgiving work cycles and the irreproducible sensual pleasure of savoring a just-picked, sun-drenched, ripe strawberry or tomato. In prose that never yields to mawkish sentimentality, Kalish details the roles of family, religion, thrift, and education in her upbringing. The complexities of wash-day chores will bring up short those who know only today's appliances. Kalish's disquisition on outhouse etiquette will simply amaze those accustomed to their own bathrooms. *Mark Knoblauch*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Landers:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite book and reading a reserve. Beside you can solve your trouble; you can add your knowledge by the publication entitled Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression. Try to stumble through book Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression as your friend. It means that it can to be your friend when you sense alone and beside that of course make you smarter than previously. Yeah, it is very fortuned for you. The book makes you more confidence because you can know every little thing by the book. So , let us make new experience and knowledge with this book.

Ricky Copeland:

Playing with family within a park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you may have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. One particular activity that make you not experiencing tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression, you can enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still wish to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout people. What? Still don't get it, oh come on its referred to as reading friends.

Shawn Stoltzfus:

Your reading 6th sense will not betray a person, why because this Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression reserve written by well-known writer who really knows well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who all read the book. Written with good manner for you, leaking every ideas and publishing skill only for eliminate your hunger then you still question Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression as good book but not only by the cover but also through the content. This is one guide that can break don't ascertain book by its include, so do you still needing another sixth sense to pick this kind of!? Oh come on your studying sixth sense already told you so why you have to listening to one more sixth sense.

Donna Willeford:

Many people spending their time by playing outside with friends, fun activity with family or just watching TV the entire day. You can have new activity to shell out your whole day by examining a book. Ugh, do you consider reading a book can really hard because you have to take the book everywhere? It ok you can have the e-book, taking everywhere you want in your Smart phone. Like Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression which is obtaining the e-book version. So , try out this book? Let's notice.

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