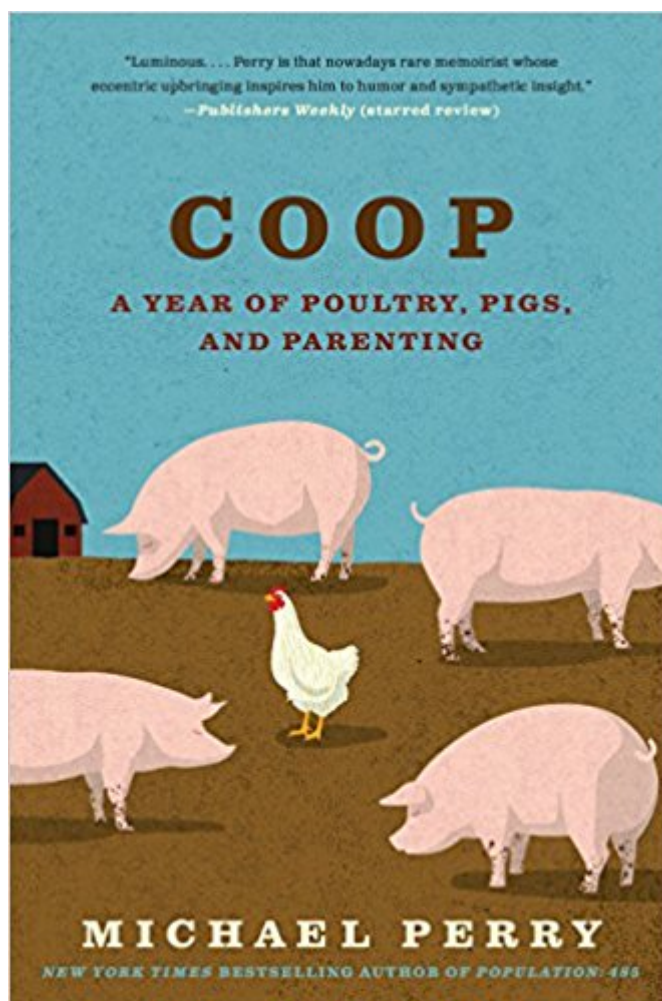


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# Coop: A Year Of Poultry, Pigs, And Parenting



## Synopsis

In over his head with two pigs, a dozen chickens, and a baby due any minute, the acclaimed author of *Population: 485* gives us a humorous, heartfelt memoir of a new life in the country. Living in a ramshackle Wisconsin farmhouse—faced with thirty-seven acres of fallen fences and overgrown fields, and informed by his pregnant wife that she intends to deliver their baby at home—Michael Perry plumbs his unorthodox childhood for clues to how to proceed as a farmer, a husband, and a father. Whether he's remembering his younger days—when his city-bred parents took in sixty or so foster children while running a sheep and dairy farm—or describing what it's like to be bitten in the butt while wrestling a pig, Perry flourishes in his trademark humor. But he also writes from the quieter corners of his heart, chronicling experiences as joyful as the birth of his child and as devastating as the death of a dear friend.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**Book Description** In over his head with two pigs, a dozen chickens, and a baby due any minute, the acclaimed author of *Truck: A Love Story* gives us a humorous, heartfelt memoir of a new life in the country. Last seen sleeping off his wedding night in the back of a 1951 International Harvester pickup, Michael Perry is now living in a rickety Wisconsin farmhouse. Faced with thirty-seven acres of fallen fences and overgrown fields, and informed by his pregnant wife that she intends to deliver their baby at home, Perry plumbs his unorthodox childhood—his city-bred parents took in more than a hundred foster children while running a ramshackle dairy farm—for clues to how to proceed as a farmer, a husband, and a father. And when his daughter Amy starts asking about God, Perry is

called upon to answer questions for which he's not quite prepared. He muses on his upbringing in an obscure fundamentalist Christian sect and weighs the long-lost faith of his childhood against the skeptical alternative ("You cannot toss your seven-year-old a copy of Being and Nothingness"). Whether Perry is recalling his childhood ("I first perceived my father as a farmer the night he drove home with a giant lactating Holstein tethered to the bumper of his Ford Falcon") or what it's like to be bitten in the butt while wrestling a pig ("two firsts in one day"), Coop is filled with the humor his readers have come to expect. But Perry also writes from the quieter corners of his heart, chronicling experiences as joyful as the birth of his child and as devastating as the death of a dear friend. Alternately hilarious, tender, and as real as pigs in mud, Coop is suffused with a contemporary desire to reconnect with the earth, with neighbors, with meaning . . . and with chickens.

Exclusive: Marshaling Memories by Mike Perry

In forming a recollection of that compelling moment when I laid my tongue upon a frozen hammerhead--an act some forty years past--I trust my memory completely. I give this trust based on the electric clarity with which I can resurrect the physical sensation of my taste buds tacking themselves to the subzero steel with a merciless subcellular crinkle. I see no need to verify this reminiscence by licking additional frozen hammers. Still, memory is a notoriously unreliable narrator, and therefore, whenever possible, I rummage around for verification. Sometimes it is as simple as calling Mom. When you took my brother Jud to the Frost-Top Drive-In on his first day with the family after the social worker dropped him off, did he (as I recall) really eat his hamburger, wrapper and all? He ate the wrapper, says Mom, but it was a hot dog. And so the correction is made.\* In other instances the verification is archival. Seeming to remember that I experienced my first religious conversion after a spate of bad behavior in third grade, I traveled to the grade school of my childhood and was allowed to rummage through a box in the subterranean boiler room until I found my third grade report cards. The following excerpt served as evidence that yes, the third grade me was in need of spiritual improvement. Also, my third grade teacher wasn't a top hand with the typewriter:

Student Attitude to Date: Work Habits: Continues to Waste Time. Mike appears to belligerent when asked to get to work. A mother's handwriting. Welcome home.

In other cases we strive not for verification but elicitation. In looking at the first photo on the right I can recall what it was like to be a shirtless farm boy in the sun; the straw-like smell of the stubble and how it pricked the soles of my bare feet; and, out of the blue, an unexpected emotional wallop as I recognize my mother's handwriting and realize that the evocation of a person hardly requires their likeness. Literal traces will do. Sometimes--and I am not speaking here of fabrication--we must construct memories we never retained. Poorly-lit as it is, the second photo tells me much about my world as it was on my third day of life: that my father was the

type of man who would grab a sheet of discarded stock from the paper mill of his employment and fashion a sign to welcome his wife and firstborn son home from the hospital; that the big ship painting currently hanging upstairs in my parents farmhouse has been in the family since the beginning; and finally (this required close study until I made out the rocking chair in the shadows, and further realized that the two strips of shininess visible toward the right side of the piano were reflected from the gilded pages of two bibles), I was able to conjure the week-old me, safe in my mother's arms, the Word of God close at hand, belief and unbelief yet to come. \*The question of Mom as unreliable narrator is not to be raised. Shame on you. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review. Perry (Population: 485) is that nowadays rare memoirist whose eccentric upbringing inspires him to humor and sympathetic insight instead of trauma mongering and self-pity. His latest essays chronicle a year on 37 acres of land with his wife, daughters and titular menagerie of livestock (who are fascinating, exasperating personalities in their own right). But these luminous pieces meander back to his childhood on the hardscrabble Wisconsin dairy farm where his parents, members of a tiny fundamentalist Christian sect, raised him and dozens of siblings and foster-siblings, many of them disabled. Perry's latter-day story is a lifestyle-farming comedy, as he juggles freelance writing assignments with the feedings, chores and construction projects that he hopes will lend him some mud-spattered authenticity. Woven through are tender, uncloying recollections of the homespun virtues of his family and community, from which sprout lessons on the labors and rewards of nurturance (and the occasional need to slaughter what you've nurtured). Perry writes vividly about rural life; peck at any sentence "One of the [chickens] stretches, one leg and one wing back in the manner of a ballet dancer warming up before the barre" and you'll find a poetic evocation of barnyard grace. Photos. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If you're a fan of Michael Perry's writing- a group I count myself as a member of- you'll find this book as funny and as touching as any of his others. Perry (for those who have yet to discover him) is a writer, musician, monologist, RN, and emergency responder who uses all these talents to eke out a modest living with his wife and daughters on a small farm near a small town in Wisconsin where he grew up. Perry's books are a series of personal histories recounting his youth, his family's history, and in the case of this volume, his attempts at trying to recreate the kind of modest farm life that he

grew up in, all the while dealing with recalcitrant animals, a new family, home birth, and his self-described semi-competence at the kinds of skills needed to accomplish all that. Luckily for Perry he has a great number of relatives, friends, and neighbors, all of whom are both ready and willing to help. Perry has the ability to be humorous without resorting to jokes and one-liners, and to be touching without ever becoming maudlin. His stories take the reader back and forth between his contemporary efforts and his life growing up on a small farm with dozens of biological, adopted, and temporary siblings, and the way he tells it, none of these experiences are or were particularly exceptional; it's just the way his life was, and is. He appreciates all of it, and manages to find the humor as well as the joy in every moment.

I loved this book maybe because I lived on a farm for a long time and I could relate. But it was great. A different style of writing but easy to get into the rhythm. I love how he professes his love for his family, especially the way he teaches his little girl things about life that most children wouldn't be ready for. But farm children are different and learn more about life at an early age. I'll probably read it again and I never do that!

I didn't love this book, but I couldn't seem to put it down. He had me, then he lost me, and then he would grow something new or get new animals and I had to see what became of them. If you are really thinking about how it would be to really have a farm to work, read this book. It isn't sugar coated, but it is full of honest love for the land and what it takes to turn that love into a place to call home.

Michael Perry has distilled a great deal of living into a few short books. His "Population 485" grabbed me; he tells the day-to-day life stories of volunteer firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians who serve rural America, and who often make the few minutes' difference between life and death. Men and women who go about their daily business wearing a pager, which at a moment's notice may call them from being a barber or butcher to being a lifesaving rescuer or to humping a rough heavy hose into a building to save someone's home. This book, "Coop", takes you headlong into rural America. Seamlessly, he weaves the story of his present -- returning to farm life and raising his little family -- with stories of his past, growing up on his parents' farm. For good measure, he throws in an endearing account of his own parents' courtship and their selfless role as foster parents. He tells about of his foster sister Rya, who had Down's syndrome and a cardiac defect that was to prove fatal. His account of the last evening of her short life would bring tears to

the eyes of a ceramic frog. It is the most powerful and evocative few pages of writing I've read. I am an adopted son of the same part of the country he writes about, and our shared experiences -- raking, baling and putting up hay, for instance -- make reading his book feel the same as sitting around with an old friend having a beer and talking about days on the farm. But he infuses poetry into his descriptions: "Sisal [twine] that smelled of oil and Brazilian sun...". What a visceral image that brings! That scene, a simple description of putting up a field of hay into bales for winter -- took me back over the decades in a rush of memory. Even if you're a lifelong "city slicker", you must have this book. Not from the library, no, it must be on your shelf. Breeze through it once, stopping only to catch your breath as you find you've read something profound in its simplicity. Dog-ear your favorite passages and go read them again. Slowly. See if you can figure out how he does it. Michael Perry is certainly a reader's writer, but he is a writer's writer. He's one of the best we have, and this in my opinion is his finest work to date.

This book was recommended by Book Bub and I bought it because of the Wisconsin setting; I grew up in Wisconsin. I was soon pulled into the day to day events of the family presented with an uncanny sense of humor. Although the book is written with a humorous tone, the author includes numerous aspects of day to day life, some of which brought tears to my eyes. I highly recommend this as an enjoyable read. Now that I know the author has other books, I plan on enjoying them also. PS - because it sounded familiar, I went to a map to find (without success) a road mentioned in the book. I found out later that the name was familiar because my brother lived on the road, but the name has been changed from when the author lived there.

Having spent my life just across the river in rural mn, your experiences closely resemble our life. I really admire the talent to write about such mundane things and make it interesting. I think I married the twin to Mills. Piles of stuff everywhere! We are better stocked than most hardware stores if you can only find it. Having such total recall of the minute memories of childhood I had forgotten about. Total laugh out loud stories and others to bring you to tears. A must read if you are contemplating the simple life. Thank you!

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