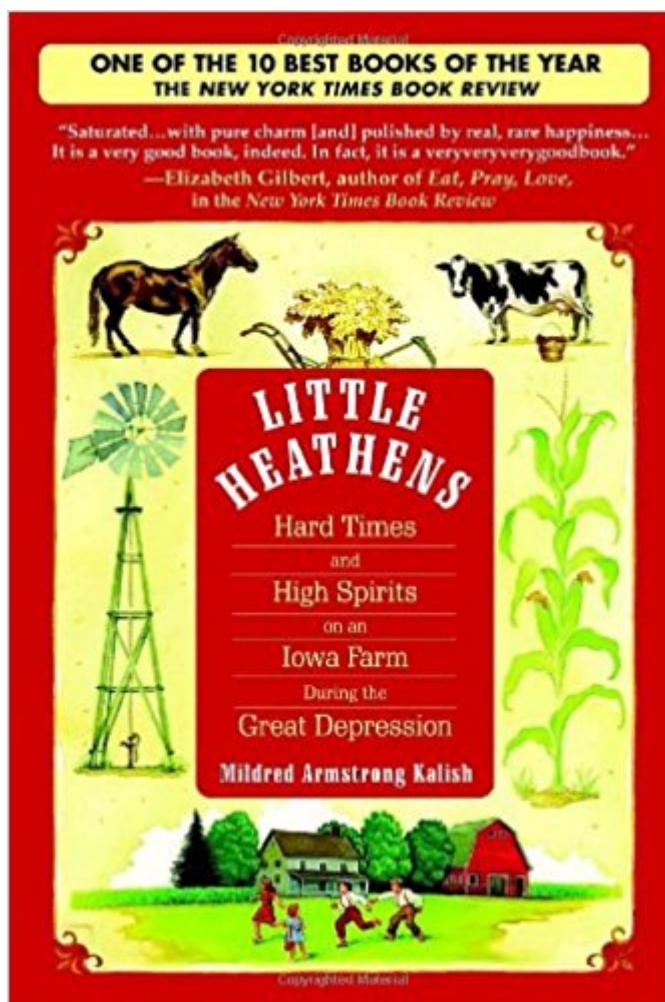


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# Little Heathens: Hard Times And High Spirits On An Iowa Farm During The Great Depression



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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. 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.

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—and crazy to say, but such is human nature—that we never experienced the Depression-era challenges and triumphs so lovingly recounted. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of

this title.

An amazing book! A memoir, plainly told, of a farm childhood in a small Midwestern town. The details of everyday life were in part a revelation and in part a reminder of stories my grandmother had told me. The current generation of young people should read this book to get a clue about past generations. Older generations should read this book to remember the treats and travails of a much more difficult life. Mildred Kalish is a keen observer and an expert writer. Never self-pitying, never cute, never condescending, never sentimental, always clear, her balanced prose opens a door to yesterday. This book is a treasure!

This is a very enjoyable, squeaky-clean memoir of a girlhood on a family farm in the 1930s. It is truly amazing how these little stories of hard work, making do, and family and friends can show how different life was then, yet reflect so well on "The Greatest Generation." Although a different time and place, memories from my own childhood, some thirty years later, crept into my thoughts while reading this little gem. Highly recommended for older readers and for those who appreciate the history of their parents and grandparents.

This book is great. My mom read it in her book club and recommended it to me. She grew up on a ranch in Montana about the same time Mildred Kalish was growing up on a farm in Iowa. Mom was struck by the great number of similarities in their lives in rural America during the 20s and 30s. Mildred is a great story teller. She gives you a realistic picture of life in those days.

I come from a long line of men and women who "worked the land" and this book gave me such a great appreciation for the generations that came before me. My father and mother were teen-agers living on farms during the depression and even though they were not in Iowa, I suspect, Nebraska farming was much the same. The story is told with great humor and intelligence, candidly and without judgement. I believe that the author held her early years in high esteem, as she did the people who molded her personality during such a difficult time. It was such a pleasure reading her story that I bought multiple copies to share with family & friends that I think will appreciate the trip down memory lane.

I bought this book several years ago and loaned it out to someone and it was never returned. I am buying another copy. I love historical novels and human interest stories that show the determination

of the human spirit and you find both in this book! I also love the detail of the way of life, which may prove very interesting and helpful to any "preppers" out there! It is a lost way of life and I am so thankful it is so well preserved in this surprising book! I laughed, I cried, I loved it!

To be honest with you, I don't know who recommended this book to me but I am eternally grateful to whomever did, because it really was a fun read. I enjoyed it so much that I went out and bought my own copy of it so I can lend it to people. My great-great-grandma immigrated from Germany to Iowa and her daughter and grand-daughter grew up in Iowa till the Great Depression drove them to Ohio. The grand irony is while the author lived in Iowa during the Great Depression, my relatives moved back east looking for jobs. The stories and historical tidbits that Millie had shared about her childhood on the farm are familiar stories passed down to me from my relatives. I grew up as a town girl and so did my mom, but she would visit her cousins every summer and they lived on the farm. She would share her stories with me at the family reunions and Millie has a great way with words. Reading this book almost made me feel like I was sitting at her knees as she rocked in her rocking chair and passed on so many stories of her childhood. She has taught me a few things as well as answered so many questions I never knew that I had. This is a thoroughly enjoyable book and one that every family in the Midwest should own as a reminder of their ancestors' past. It is chock full of information, stories, old-folks' tales and musings. It is a great book to share with your children and grandchildren, and a piece of history that is made all the more real since it was penned by a woman who grew up on the farm. I love memoirs and this one just beats them all. This one comes highly recommended. 6/29/08

A recollection of life in an older time and place. Very entertaining and memory jogging for older folks like me, and enlightening for younger ones. I was amazed at how similar the customs and language were to my time and place. I thoroughly enjoyed having my memory jogged and can certainly see why those times have been called "the good old days." Yes, those times were sometimes hard but family life was so much more important and even necessary back then. It is sad how technology has taken away the social closeness that we felt then. To see so many totally involved with smart phones, and blackberries that they don't seem to see each other anymore even when together is really sad. I much prefer playing rummy, or go fishing, or monopoly with a friend or sibling to punching little buttons and ignoring my surroundings.....

LOVED LOVED ÅfÂ Å Å,Â â™Â Æœ this book! In so many ways times were much simpler then.

Of course I wouldn't enjoy not having enough money. And I certainly would be unable to kill animals for my food. But the closeness of family and community, living almost as one with nature, being active, outdoors, no internet or cell phones! I would certainly enjoy that. Such a fun book and the author sounds like someone I would like to know. She is such a positive and upbeat person. Would definitely recommend. I wish there was a series because I would read them all.

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