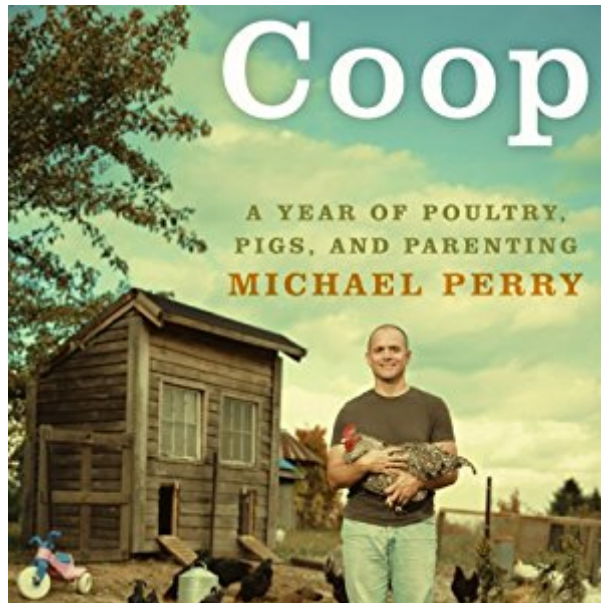


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# Coop: A Year Of Poultry, Pigs, And Parenting



## Synopsis

In over his head with two pigs, a dozen chickens, and a baby due any minute, the acclaimed author of *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 37 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 100 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Coop is one of the best books (and certainly the best memoir) I have read in many years, a perfect book for our difficult times. With humor and grace, Perry takes the reader along for a year of great changes, some positive and some devastating (I will spare the details so as not to ruin the reading experience), showing the reader that there is profundity and beauty in even the most mundane experiences of daily life. I found myself laughing and crying while reading this book, many times on the same page. In the end, what Perry achieves is not only a book about gratitude and reverence for the wonderful people and things we have in our lives, but also a pitch-perfect memoir for men and especially fathers and sons (not to say women and mothers won't love the book as well, because they will, given its universal message). This is a book that will inspire you to take stock of your life and make it a little better each day (while laughing along the way!), and if there is any justice in the publishing world, a book that will be recognized when various "best of" lists are compiled.

Michael Perry's new farm was not much like the one he grew up on. It didn't have sheep or cows --- in fact, it had no animals at all. It lacked the noise of a big family; there was just Perry and his wife, Anneliese, and young daughter Amy. But this small family had dreams of free-range chickens, a bountiful garden and fat pigs, and set out to make their newly acquired patch of Wisconsin land home. Perry chronicles their first year on the farm in his latest book, COOP. In the course of the year, as they settled in to farm life, something Perry and his wife are both familiar with, the family finds small joys in watching chickens and enormous joys in the birth of their baby daughter. They suffer the loss of family members and dear friends, and work hard in homeschooling Amy, raising two pigs and maintaining the land. All the while Perry still works as a freelance writer, a job that takes him away from home more often than he'd like. As much as Perry is writing about trying to build a home for his growing family and create a certain level of sustainability and self-sufficiency, he is also writing about his childhood and the Wisconsin farm that he himself lived on growing up. Raised by caring and open-hearted parents who were members of a little known, religiously conservative Protestant group, Perry was surrounded by siblings and family friends, and was expected to work hard on the farm. He and his wife hope to instill much of his parents' wisdom in their daughters, but they also have their own strong ideas about family and farming. In attempting to find a balance between the two worldviews, Perry shares his thoughts, his successes (raising two healthy pigs for slaughter) and failures (a 50% chicken mortality rate), his moments of pride and his storms of frustration. While his life is not a typical middle-class existence, his hopes, fears,

exasperations and jokes will resonate with readers from all different backgrounds. Perry's memories of his parents, brothers, sisters and the foster children who lived with them are written with honesty and kindness. These are the same qualities that characterize his writing overall. From livestock auctions to home births, from coop building to funerals, Perry shines when documenting the everyday and has a talent for making the everyday extraordinary. His style is humorous but sometimes melancholy, bold and self-deprecating. Though sometimes a bit repetitive and prone to too much skipping about in time, COOP is a fun and compelling read. Perry is a likable host and guide to mid-western sensibility and the intricacies and rhythms of rural life. In the first pages, he writes, "[W]e are going rural in the hope that we might become more self-sufficient in terms of firewood, an expanded garden, and perhaps a pair of pigs." But quickly after reading this, it becomes obvious that Perry and his family are embarking on a grander journey. They are exploring the concept of roots, literally and figuratively: examining the meaning of home, family and community with their hands in the soil tending to other kinds of growing things. --- Reviewed by Sarah Rachel Egelman

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 rented this book from my library's ebook collection, so I didn't look at the .com description or reviews. I found the book quite boring, and seemed to be more about his early life in a

fundamentalist Christian sect than about farming. I guess I was looking more for about trials about living on the farm, rather than choosing an at home birth and about not watching TV. I also found many of his comparisons annoying. I don't know why, but I just thought he was trying too hard to "help us relate" and they stuck out rather than help with the flow of the book.

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