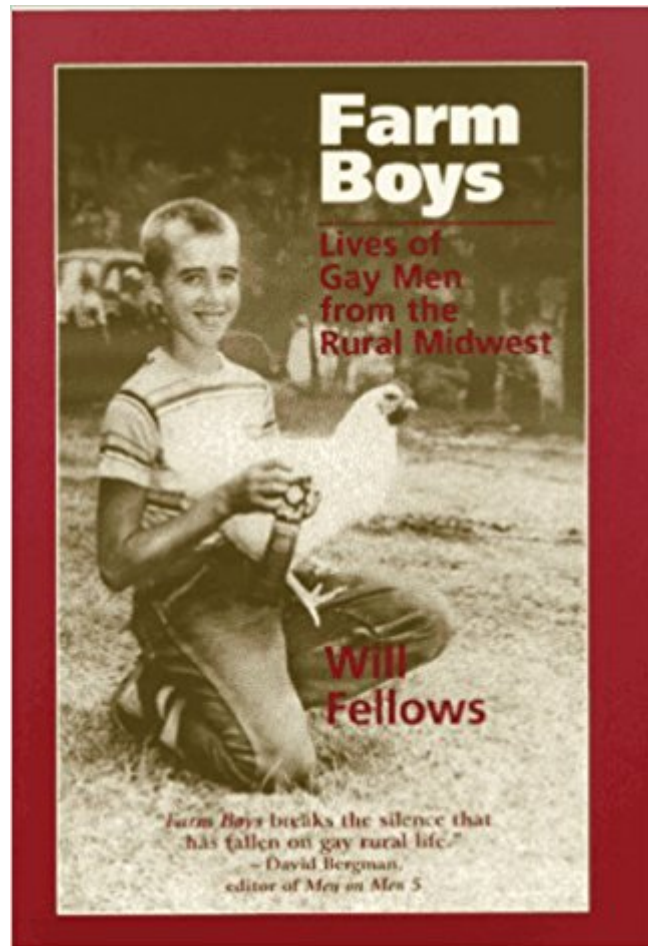


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# Farm Boys: Lives Of Gay Men From The Rural Midwest



## Synopsis

Homosexuality is often seen as a purely urban experience, far removed from rural and small-town life. *Farm Boys* undermines that cliché by telling the stories of more than three dozen gay men, ranging in age from 24 to 84, who grew up in farm families in the midwestern United States. Whether painful, funny, or matter-of-fact, these plain-spoken accounts will move and educate any reader, gay or not, from farm or city.

“When I was fifteen, the milkman who came to get our milk was beautiful. This is when I was really getting horny to do something with another guy. I waited every day for him to come. I couldn’t even talk to him, couldn’t think of anything to say. I just stood there, watching him, wondering if he knew why.” Henry Bauer, Minnesota

“When I go back home, I feel a real connection with the land—a tremendous feeling, spiritual in a way. It makes me want to go out into a field and take my shoes off and put my feet right on the dirt, establish a real physical connection with that place. I get homesick a lot, but I don’t know if I could ever go back there and live. It’s not the kind of place that would welcome me if I lived openly, the way that I would like to live. I would be shunned.” Martin Scherz, Nebraska

“If there is a checklist to see if your kid is queer, I must have hit every one of them—all sorts of big warning signs. I was always interested in a lot of the traditional queen things—clothes, cooking, academics, music, theater. A farm boy listening to show tunes? My parents must have seen it coming.” Joe Shulka, Wisconsin

“My favorite show when I was growing up was *The Waltons*. The show’s values comforted me, and I identified with John-Boy, the sensitive son who wanted to be a writer. He belonged there on the mountain with his family, yet he sensed that he was different and that he was often misunderstood. Sometimes I still feel like a misfit, even with gay people.” Connie Sanders, Illinois

“Agriculture is my life. I like working with farm people, although they don’t really understand me. When I retire I want the word to get out [that I’m gay] to the people I’ve worked with—the dairy producers, the veterinarians, the feed salesmen, the guys at the co-ops. They’re going to be shocked, but their eyes are going to be opened.” James Heckman, Indiana

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I grew up and still live in a rural area but didn't work on a farm. But you could have lived in NYC all your life and still identify with some of these stories. A very raw and real book. I swear when I was reading some of what these guys said, I almost dropped the book because it was EXACTLY what I have felt and gone through. I wish the author would write another book like this. If you have always thought of yourself as on the outside of gay culture, then you will identify with the experiences documented in the book. Couldn't put it down.

Farm Boys includes the first person narratives of gay men who grew up on farms in the Midwest. Begun as a sociological study, the book is an excellent glimpse into the lives of rural gay men and their perceptions of their urban brothers. Divided into three parts (men born early in the century, those born after WWII but before Stonewall, and those born after Stonewall), these narratives of varying length show how each succeeding group came to grips with being gay without the assistance of role models, help groups, or even knowledge that other men and boys like them lived in the same area as they. Although there are some differences that separate the three groups, some common themes were shared by most. One, most of these rural men gave up their religious beliefs, but not their spirituality. They saw organized faiths as being hypocritical and having a facade, but this was not enough to cause them to doubt the existence of a god. Two, many of these men grew up in families that could be classified as "don't talk, don't feel," especially when the subject was sex. Left on their own, many felt obligated to get married because they knew of no other way. And three, once they realized they were gay, this epiphany type revelation about themselves was often very self liberating. Also of interest to me was the references to how media, such as Time Magazine, Life Magazine, and other outlets, addressed the topic of homosexuality 30 and 40 years ago, and how that portrayal continues to change. More of us being out, obviously, has had a cumulative effect to everyone's benefit, and will continue to do so. A marvelous book, and highly recommended for

anyone interested in the lives and history of gay men.

A friend gave me this book when it first came out. I was very impressed with each man's story. Anyone who reads this will gain an understanding of how life was for young gay men growing up in the semi-isolation of farm life. The stories are told with feeling and show the amazing coping skills of each person. They paint an amazing picture of the life of gay people in the early/middle part of the 1900's.

This is an incredible book. I casually picked it up since it was prominently displayed in a bookstore. I ended up not wanting to put it down. To describe it defies the impact that the book could have if you read it. Fellows captures humanity beautifully without any proselytizing of his own. The men's lives portrayed in this book were so different from my own in suburban Connecticut. However, it made no difference. I loved this book.

I knew the stories before I read them, but I had to know how each of the men survived, or soared or succumbed. It is a book for all gay men and straight people to understand the closets within the closets within the closets that some of us survive.

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