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I Am Hutterite



Synopsis

A fascinating journey into the heart and culture of a reclusive religious community. *I Am Hutterite* takes listeners into the hidden heart of the little-known Hutterite colony in southern Manitoba, where author Mary-Ann Kirkby spent her childhood. When she was 10 years old her parents packed up their seven children and a handful of possessions and left the security of the colony to start a new life. Overnight they were thrust into a world they didn't understand, a world that did not understand them. Before she left the colony Mary-Ann had never tasted macaroni and cheese or ridden a bike. She had never heard of Walt Disney or rock-and-roll. She was forced to reinvent herself, denying her heritage to fit in with her peers. With great humor, Kirkby describes how she adapted to popular culture, and with raw honesty her family's deep sense of loss for their community. More than a history lesson, *I Am Hutterite* is a powerful tale of retracing steps and understanding how our beginnings often define us. Controversial and acclaimed by the Hutterite community, Kirkby's book unveils the rich history and traditions of her people, giving us a rare and intimate portrait of an extraordinary way of life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This interesting story does not live up to its title. I thoroughly enjoyed the book. It is straight-up memoir, full of the range of experiences of a human life. It made me laugh, it made me cry, it made me think about the profound nature of forgiveness, and it reminded me of my own parents' rural homes. There is nothing telling that Mary-Ann reclaimed her heritage, just that she reconciled with

some relatives and kept in contact with them. From the epilogue, it appears that the author now lives "in the world" outside of any Hutterite colony. I would be interested to know, in what way does the author consider herself still Hutterite? Does she still practice the Hutterite brand of Anabaptist Christianity, outside of the communal living aspect? Does she still speak the old Carinthian dialect at home? From the press release, it is obvious that she does not dress in the customary manner of Hutterites. At what point is Hutterite merely her heritage, and not her identity today? Are we to understand that "Hutterite" is a religion and an ethnicity, analogous to being a Jew? One more small criticism: For authentic tone, the author has included snatches of dialog in the Carinthian dialect. Most of the time she translates these phrases, but some are left standing alone. I know German, but I still did not understand some of these phrases, which are from a dialect in Austria of 400 years ago. This is not really fair to the English-language reader, since there is no place to look up a translation of this dialect.

Slow moving and very descriptive, this is also a book with rich details of a lifestyle not well known to most of us. Another reviewer said something along the lines of "this is all about ordinary life, and really, ordinary life is just not interesting." I chose to ignore this comment, as I believe ordinary life holds a lot of fascinating stuff! But after reading the whole book (and it was a slow go), I agree with this reviewer's sentiment. The idea of this book holds great promise. Not too many people know much about this society, and from what she explains, there is much to learn from its ideas and lifestyle. The main action of the story--leaving the colony--could have been suspenseful and engaging, if the author had taken these details and surrounded the action. Instead, somehow, the main action seemed to be lost under all the explanations of the roles of people in the colony and the way the food was prepared. I also longed for character development, which just never happened. I fully believed the author's contention that the decision to leave the colony would have been incredibly painful for her parents. But they exist only on the periphery, and the relationships are never really explored. I was surprised when I finished this book. It seemed like it never really got started, so how could it end? It had so much potential.

I had no knowledge of the Hutterites and their practices. It is too bad that human nature makes communities like this a failure. I am not saying that I agree with all the rules but the community cohesion and sharing of work and profits is amazing. Unfortunately leaders can become dictators and everything falls apart. Even so the book is uplifting and the characters are strong, hardworking and courageous.

With the current dismal state of our world, I looked forward every night to reading this book of a spunky girl of Hutterite descent. I had never heard of Hutterites before and I believe I have a very good idea of their life and culture from this reading. Moreso, the tale of Ann-Marie's transition to Mary Ann was delightful and reminded me of the value of wholesomeness, industry and closeness to community.

This book is an absorbing read. It brings you vividly into a little-known but (as the title says) fascinating world where a brave group of people has been striving to follow a Biblical model of communal living for hundreds of years. The author does an excellent job of bringing "colony" (the term for the community) life alive not just by recounting events, but bringing them alive with sensory detail. Her consistent preoccupation with the difference between her experience of food on and off the colony might be the greatest virtue of the book. There is a lot more than food in the book, however. The whole deeply important question of how to live one's life as a Christian, or indeed, as a human being period, permeates this book. The good, the bad, the shortcomings, courage, pride, banality, boredom, and glory of living shine through, as on the colony life becomes so simple that there is nothing left, in the end, but one another. The ability or inability to love one's neighbor gives this narration its sturdy bones. The only thing missing from this book-- which somehow I would expect from a lifelong resident of central Canada-- was some kind of indication about how hard the winters were. Most of the book seemed to be narrated in the glorious summers of Manitoba rather than the desperately long winters. It would have added an extra edge to an already poignant tale.

This book is a wonderful window into one of the most fascinating Christian subcultures. Hutterites seem to focus on the sharing of resources and community life aspects of the new testament church. Seeing the challenges faced by those who try to leave, as well as those who try to stay and work within their system, showed me that we all need love and compassion, and there are both pluses and minuses to each way of life. Thank you for sharing, Mary-Ann!

Well written account of someone raised in a very insulated culture excluding some modern conveniences but not all. A world where every need and chattles are owned communally. The author is then ripped from this world and flung into the modern one. Really interesting and enlightening.

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