



# Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression

By Mildred Armstrong Kalish

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*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.*

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

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—crazy to say, but such is human nature—that we never experienced the Depression-era challenges and triumphs so lovingly recounted.

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From [Booklist](#)

This unpretentious yet deeply intelligent memoir of growing up on a central Iowa farm in the throes of the Great Depression radiates the joy of a vanished way of life as Kalish recounts what appear to contemporary eyes as unendurable deprivations. Those who share Kalish's midwestern farm background will immediately identify with her recollections of winter nights spent under layers of quilts in unheated bedrooms. Others for whom agrarian life is uncharted territory will learn both the harsh rigors of days governed by unforgiving work cycles and the irreproducible sensual pleasure of savoring a just-picked, sun-drenched, ripe strawberry or tomato. In prose that never yields to mawkish sentimentality, Kalish details the roles of family, religion, thrift, and education in her upbringing. The complexities of wash-day chores will bring up short those who know only today's appliances. Kalish's disquisition on outhouse etiquette will simply amaze those accustomed to their own bathrooms. *Mark Knoblauch*

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**Catherine Poppe:**

The particular book *Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression* will bring someone to the new experience of reading some sort of book. The author style to clarify the idea is very unique. If you try to find new book you just read, this book very acceptable to you. The book *Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression* is much recommended to you to study. You can also get the e-book in the official web site, so you can easier to read the book.

**Katherin Buerger:**

Precisely why? Because this *Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression* is an unordinary book that the inside of the guide waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will distress you with the secret it inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who all write the book in such amazing way makes the content interior easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning completely. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This amazing book will give you a lot of gains than the other book have got such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking way. So , still want to postpone having that book? If I were being you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

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