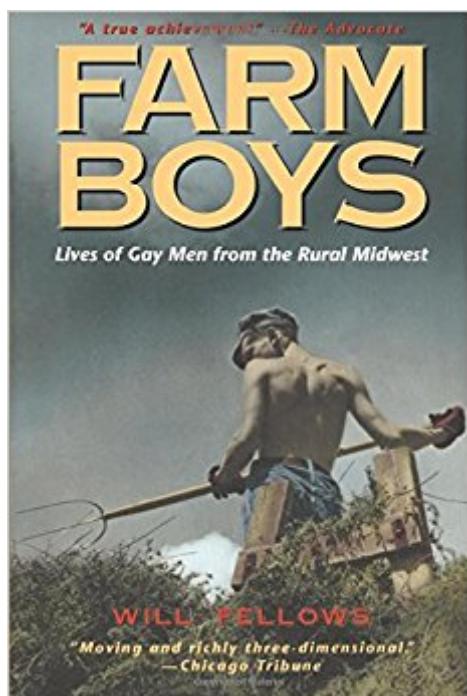


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# Farm Boys: Lives Of Gay Men From The Rural Midwest



## **Synopsis**

Homosexuality is often seen as a purely urban experience, far removed from rural and small-town life. Farm Boys undermines that cliche 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.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Fellows's project is a true achievement, one to take its rightful place in future studies of gay American history."--"The Advocate""These coming-of-age stories from men ranging from 24 to 84 smash the stereotype that gay culture is exclusively an urban culture."--"Chicago Tribune""The book contains scrapbook snapshots treasured by their families for decades--as tender and as innocent as the memories they evoke."--"Omaha World-Herald""Farm Boys" breaks the silence that has fallen on gay rural life."&#151;David Bergman, editor of "Men on Men 5: Best New Gay Fiction"

Will Fellows is a writer and educator who grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm. He lives in Milwaukee.

Very personal accounts of growing up gay on a farm. Would that I had found this book sooner! I identified with the innate struggle that all these men went through as I spent the first 18 years of my life on a crop and 50 herd dairy farm. I relished and reminisced with the pleasure and pain, and as with many of these men I know cherish that way of life. The style of writing was a bit awkward as it

was not always chronologically told. A story would start in childhood, advance to adulthood and then revert back to the earlier years. But still not bothersome enough to rate it any lower than it's worthy five-stars.

As a former 4Her, and animal science major in college, I was also torn between following my love of country living and coming out as a gay man. I really wanted to be a large animal vet, but in college, I realized that living in the country would be too isolating, and that I needed to move to a city to find my place. Reading the stories of other gay men who experienced similar conflicts and choices was very cathartic. This book helped me to realize that there are no right or wrong decisions here, just experiences....all valuable in their own way, pleasures and pains in all walks of life.

The life of the urban gay man is the one we see on screen, the one marching at Pride festivals, and the one given the most exposure. Here Will Fellows collects the life stories of the men who grew up in the farm lands of America's rural midwest, and this catalogue of lives from men who more often than not grew up in strict German homes where sexuality (and certainly not homosexuality) were not discussed is a fascinating mixture. The stories range from brutal accounts to some that sound almost idyllic, and shows how these men feel their very different upbringing shaped them. The accounts are chronological, and show not only the changing acceptance of gay men (slow, and hidden) but also the loss of the old-style farms with their variety of livestock and crops to great business farms with only one product.

I really enjoyed reading this collection of stories very much and learned quite a bit about lives of gay men who grew up on farms. Some of them went into more detail about farm life than others--some of them told more about their lives AFTER leaving the farm, but all in all they were real interesting. I've got to hand it to every one of them, I don't know if I could have 'cut it' on a farm. Suppose I wouldn't of had a choice if I had been born to a farm family--but I certainly do see where these fellas have a 'hard row to hoe' (yes, a pun but still serious) because if they DO like farm life, they wouldn't have such a good life being gay. So I can see where most of them would end up leaving. How could you live an open life?? I think someone growing up on a farm would have a much stronger viewpoint on life. It would be kind of like growing up during the Depression at any age or time period. So physical and demanding--nothing happening or getting done unless YOU do it!! Not like the urban city life I was born into. I really hand it to farm people and gained a new respect for them. They can proclaim like the Marines...."the few, the proud".

I am still reading Farm Boys and find it very interesting. I also grew up on a farm & can relate to all of the stories I have read so far. I know when I get to the end of the book I will be wanting more stories from other farm boys.

It's not about being gay, or living on a farm, or growing up in rural areas where your entire life is centered on a small representation of what is available. It's about identity, about what molds some people into the individuals they become. The stories run the gamut from simple and uplifting, to long and angry, representing factions within the gay community without being held back by the knowledge that it's a faction of its own. It's next to impossible not to be moved by them, and even harder not to reach a keener insight into American rural culture throughout the twentieth century. The ambling nature of the prose is a superb reflection of not only the older generations represented within the interviews, but of the environment within which they were raised.

The stories told in "Farm Boys" are sometimes touching, sometimes funny, sometimes sexy and virtually always compelling. The loneliness which an emerging gay personality must feel in the solitude that characterizes most American farms must be overbearing at times. A key element in many of the stories told in this book is families which do not and cannot understand homosexuality until it comes to roost at home. Another is the strong religious background which many of the men have faced and dealt with. Not all of the stories end happily -- one of the men, for example, committed suicide shortly after the interview with him was completed. But most of the tales are affirmations of personal confidence and development, and they are bracing even to those of us who feel that the best thing about the countryside is that it is possible to return to the city from it, preferably immediately. Will Fellows has added an important contribution to gay male history, and he is to be highly praised for it. Even greater praise, however, must go to the men who have forthrightly told their tales, many of them reporting along the way that their communities are still not aware of their sexuality. That takes bravery, as does the ability to look deeply into one's own life and background. What a wonderful book.

I read this for my FOG (Fellowship of Older Gays) Book Club here in San Diego. Reviews from all members were glowing. I, myself, will always cherish these stories..individually and collectively they all touched my heart and gave me valuable insight into my life experiences. I heartily recommend it for all age groups.

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