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Review: *A Very Small Farm*

By William Paul Winchester

Reviewed by Irwin Weintraub
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Winchester, William Paul. *A Very Small Farm*. Tulsa, OK, Council Oak Books, 1996. Illustration by Carol Stanton. 229 p. US \$17.95. ISBN: 1-57178-021-1.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to buy some land and make a living as a small farmer? After receiving his bachelor's degree in botany from the University of Tulsa, William Paul Winchester followed his dream and bought a 20 acre farm in northeastern Oklahoma in order to find out.

A Very Small Farm chronicles Winchester's daily life on the farm he calls "Southwind." Southwind has an apple orchard, a peach orchard, a poultry yard, and a quarter acre of garden. He describes his daily routines and management techniques at the farm including repairs to his house, planting and tending his crops, looking after his chickens, and collecting eggs. His main source of income is the sale of honey from fifty beehives and occasional odd jobs in the community.

Although he learned farming on the job, Winchester is also a skilled mechanic, carpenter, cook, writer, and naturalist. In *A Very Small Farm*, we learn of his life at Southwind through his thoughts about the weather, seasonal changes, machinery repair, vegetarian recipes, cooking, and the flora and fauna of the region. His thoughts about bees and their social structure are entertaining and insightful. We get to know Isabel, his Jersey cow, as he warmly describes how he raised her from a calf and continues to cater to her needs in return for the milk she produces twice daily. Berenice, his dog, and many cats, are also Southwind inhabitants.

Winchester's success as a subsistence farmer is illustrated by his comment: "The produce from my garden is so abundant, it's been five months since I was last at the grocery store, and then for so few items I can still list them from memory" (12). He produces enough food for the whole year and cans many items to keep him supplied. His pantry includes asparagus, peas, carrots, zucchini, green beans, sweet corn,

tomatoes, peaches, grapes, pears, plums, applesauce and cider. He stores sacks and canisters of dried corn, grain amaranth, sesame seeds, peas, okra, beans, fruit leather, figs, peaches and plums.

Throughout the book, we see that Winchester considers Southwind his home and does not feel deprived by his frugal existence. On this farm, he has achieved a richness and a sense of worth that comes from farming and getting by on his own wits. Here, the land is his nurturer, nature's creatures are his friends, and reading great literature fills his leisure hours.

A Very Small Farm is recommend reading for all those who daydream about the joys of farming and country life and need inspiration from somebody who lives it.

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