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The Secret Life Of Cowboys



Synopsis

"One of the stories I tell myself when I am trying to fall asleep is that I have tried. I've tagged along after myself in the pages of my own modern Western, and every few years is another chapter to the story. The myth of the cowboy. I chased a dream and it kicked me in the teeth. Yet I find myself falling for it again and again." Across the rugged and beautiful landscape of the contemporary American West, Tom Groneberg paints an unsparing portrait of his flawed, funny, and sometimes triumphant efforts to become a cowboy. It is a classic tale: a young man, facing a future he doesn't want to claim, has an inspiration -- Go West. Leaving behind his friends and family, Groneberg follows his heart and heads to a resort town in the Colorado Rockies, where he earns his spurs as a wrangler leading tourists on horseback. Like an old saddle blanket, the tale unfolds, revealing the clean threads of a new story. Groneberg moves to Montana, working for wages at a number of ranches before getting a chance to become the owner of a sprawling ranch, fifteen square miles of grass and sky. In lean but passionate prose, Groneberg demystifies the image of cowboy as celluloid hero and introduces us to the tough and kindhearted men who teach him how to be a real cowboy, the woman who teaches him how to love, and their son, who teaches him how to be a man. The Secret Life of Cowboys is both a coming-of-age story as stunning as the land itself and a revealing look at America's last frontier.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a great title for maybe a different book. Expecting to find some salty insight into the hearts and minds of cowboys, the men who live and work as agricultural laborers in the modern West, I

found instead the memoir of a young man from Chicago, still in his 30s, who falls in love with wide open spaces and tries to live out a dream of working with cattle and being a rancher. The problem is that he is almost totally unprepared for the arduous task of running a ranch and lacks the seasoned philosophy of a man who has experienced lean years, loss, and failure. Taking on a 15-square-mile ranch outside Miles City, Montana, he is quickly in over his head and in a matter of time is surviving on anti-depressants. Hard winters, hard luck, and lack of experience combine to turn his dream into heartbreak. I seldom read a book that makes me tear up, but this one did, about page 220 when on a September day, he watches as his neighbors gather to buy at auction his machinery and equipment. Any reader used to the unforgiving seasons of the plains, especially in Montana, might remain dried-eyed at Groneberg's foolhardy and romantic expectations of ranching, but to know him for the tender, ingenuous soul that he seems to be in his book, it's hard to see his failure as anything but the unhappy end of a big-hearted dream. The secret in the secret life of cowboys remains something of an elusive mystery for Groneberg. Along with him, we observe cowboys from the outside, a fraternity of men engaged in hard, physical labor, masters of skills learned from boyhood, able to do their jobs in severe working conditions, and possessors of a kind of grace beyond words to describe.

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