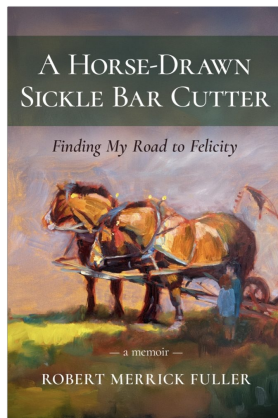




INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



A Horse-Drawn Sickle Bar Cutter

By Robert Merrick Fuller

Genre: Memoir

Reviewed by Elizabeth Reiser

An inspirational memoir of a colorful life

If there is one thing Robert Fuller wants readers to grasp while reading his memoir, it is that anyone can make their life what they want it to be. After all, as he states throughout, if he can do it, anyone can.

Fuller's life started as the very picture of post-war Americana: on a dairy farm, born to generations of dairy farmers and a father who fought in the war. He spends the first part of the book discussing his childhood and upbringing openly and honestly, including recounting his struggles with bedwetting and discovering his sexual urges at the local swimming beach. The beginning sets the book up well, starting with him as an innocent small-town boy, but with his experiences setting the stage for the adventurous imp he will become.

While the early part of the book focuses on his home life and family history, things take a different turn when Fuller leaves home as a young adult. From failed romances to exploring 1960s America on his motorcycle, the reader grows up with him as he figures out what he wants to do with his life. He finds his calling and heads to The Culinary Institute of America, followed by various restaurant odd jobs, eventually owning his own restaurants. This journey is winding and non-linear, as memory can often feel, but his recounting of these events is undoubtedly entertaining.

Underselling himself is a common thread throughout his story. Fuller frequently states he's led an accomplished life for someone he believed wouldn't amount to much. Self-deprecating to the max, Fuller never pretends to be something he is not, and he lays his failures out alongside his successes. He's got a charming sense of humor, and it adds a feeling of great authenticity to his story. He always feels very real.

While Fuller doesn't hesitate to sell himself short, he is just as quick to highlight his wife Alison's merits. The last section of his book is a sort of romantic ode to her, and it is clear not only how much he loves her, but how deeply she has impacted his joy of life. It's so rewarding to see him come full circle—from a lost soul finding his way to someone fully settled and content.

Some elements of the memoir can feel like oversharing, but it's particularly true of the retelling of his ex-lover's struggles with mental health and the inclusion of a topless photo of her.

A Horse-Drawn Sickle Bar Cutter is a vitalizing coming of age story that captures an authentic slice of American history. Those feeling nostalgic will love getting lost in this snapshot.