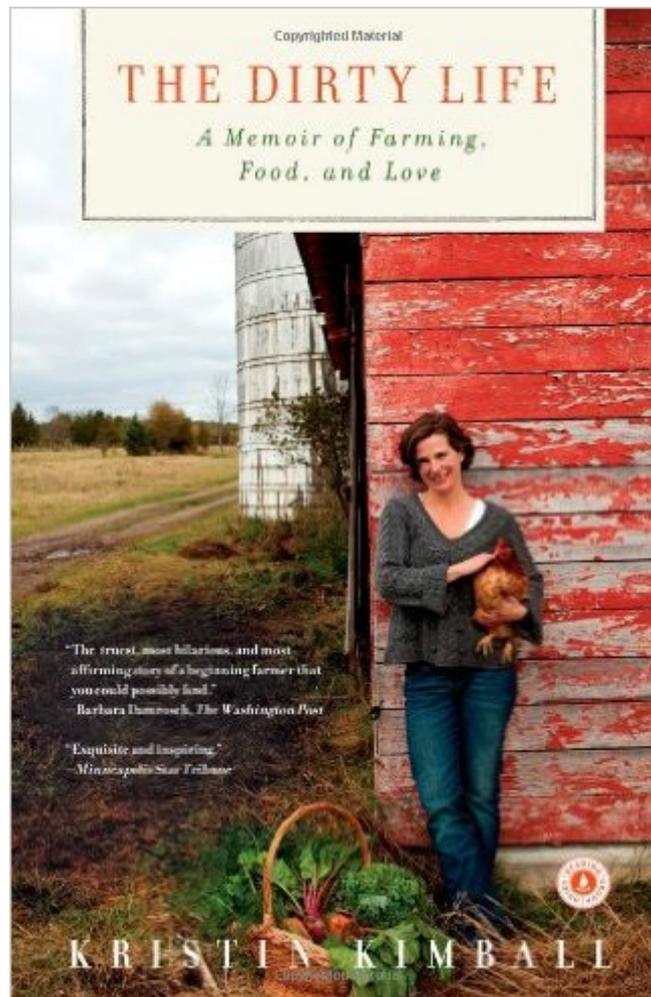


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The Dirty Life: A Memoir Of Farming, Food, And Love



Synopsis

From a graceful, luminous writer with an eye for detail, this riveting memoir explores a year on a sustainable farm and the real world epitome of Michael Pollan's food philosophy. "This book is the story of the two love affairs that interrupted the trajectory of my life: one with farming that dirty, concupiscent art and the other with a complicated and exasperating farmer." Single, thirtysomething, working as a writer in New York City, Kristin Kimball was living life as an adventure. But she was beginning to feel a sense of longing for a family and for home. When she interviewed a dynamic young farmer, her world changed. Kristin knew nothing about growing vegetables, let alone raising pigs and cattle and driving horses. But on an impulse, smitten, if not yet in love, she shed her city self and moved to five hundred acres near Lake Champlain to start a new farm with him. *The Dirty Life* is the captivating chronicle of their first year on Essex Farm, from the cold North Country winter through the following harvest season complete with their wedding in the loft of the barn. Kimball and her husband had a plan: to grow everything needed to feed a community. It was an ambitious idea, a bit romantic, and it worked. Every Friday evening, all year round, a hundred people travel to Essex Farm to pick up their weekly share of the "whole diet" beef, pork, chicken, milk, eggs, maple syrup, grains, flours, dried beans, herbs, fruits, and forty different vegetables produced by the farm. The work is done by draft horses instead of tractors, and the fertility comes from compost. Kimball's vivid descriptions of landscape, food, cooking and marriage are irresistible. "As much as you transform the land by farming," she writes, "farming transforms you." In her old life, Kimball would stay out until four a.m., wear heels, and carry a handbag. Now she wakes up at four, wears Carhartts, and carries a pocket knife. At Essex Farm, she discovers the wrenching pleasures of physical work, learns that good food is at the center of a good life, falls deeply in love, and finally finds the engagement and commitment she craved in the form of a man, a small town, and a beautiful piece of land.

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Customer Reviews

Although I am generally no fan of the memoir, I was deeply moved by *The Dirty Life*. Author Kristin Kimball first dissects her decision to give up a freelance writing career and a rent-controlled NYC apartment to start a sustainable agricultural venture with her then-fiance in upstate New York. She then smartly breaks the rest of the book up by season, going into just enough detail about the daily operations of the farm and the crises that crop up to draw the reader in and keep him or her invested in the outcome of this sometimes overwhelming undertaking. Kimball's voice is refreshingly unsentimental, and even in her darkest hour of the soul, she never resorts to whining. She has her doubts, to be sure, which make for an authentic, compelling read. I recommend this memoir to anyone looking for a well-written story not just about building a farm from the ground up, but also about handling the unexpected turns life sometimes takes.

This book grabs your soul. You don't want to put it down until you've consumed every last morsel. It is truly a love story! A story about the love between a man & a woman, love between farmers & love between a community & a farm. It is a story about a man who so believed in a dream that he made it materialize in spite of being surrounded by skeptics & about a woman who lost her heart to a man and to the land. This is a powerful book that is destined to be an award winning movie. A man, a woman & a community come together to make a dream a reality. It proves that life is about so much more than money. Money can not buy what the Kimballs have built!

This book, very timely with our national interest in eating local and sustainable food, is a touching account of a woman falling in life with a man and falling in love with the land they work. Anyone who has ever been drawn to growing their own food, or who has nostalgic memories of parents or grandparents doing so, will be greatly rewarded by this book. Kimball's writing style is direct, enjoyable, and quite humorous. A story she recounts about both she and her soon-to-be husband's parents meeting for the first time is absolutely hilarious. Though this book is a book about farming and the lives of a husband and a wife, the book ultimately connects readers to themselves and the world around them.

While at first glance it seems this memoir is for those who know farm life, it holds more for those who don't. Kristin Kimball beautifully describes the rawness and romanticism of working hard with someone you love to achieve a dream. It renews your faith in a younger generation that values the way farms used to be - family owned and community supported, both frustrating and fantastic, and eternally dirty. Kimball's descriptive phrasing will make you long to sip straight from the sap bucket again.

I loved this book. I was looking forward to romanticized stories on farming and fresh, local food. But I got so much more. Kristin Kimball allowed me to explore a world I'd never really understood with language that's beautiful, evocative and direct. More than just giving me a window into the farming life, I felt like I could touch and taste it. The grueling work. The connection with the animals. The joy of creation right alongside the very real fear of failure. I felt like I lived the stories, met the people, and ate the food. Reading "The Dirty Life" is like receiving a wonderfully generous gift. You're able to accept it without feeling guilty for not wanting to make the same trade-offs. You just want to say a heartfelt "thank you" and share it with the people you care about.

I have longed for, and not found, many modern biographical books out there about women who farm. I was excited to find this memoir, and enjoyed it, but despite the talented writing, I felt a lack of connection to the author and the people she includes in her story. I wanted to love this book, but found myself disappointed by the lack of deeper characterizations and motives revealed. Many of the author's actions, large and small, are described, but go unexamined and unexplained. I wanted a 'new best friend' in this book, but I found the author oddly emotionally unavailable, offering what felt to me like detached, generic platitudes for unique descriptions (however beautifully phrased), instead of deeply personal truths. On the other hand, I enjoyed the 'shop talk' of farming that the book offered. Much of what she describes, and describes well, will be very familiar to people who have worked on a small scale organic farming operation. I found myself laughing and sighing at what was very recognizable. Occasionally a detail is thrown into the story that to me didn't quite resonate with the rest of the character of the book - a few of her musings and memories felt gratuitous, undeveloped, or incongruous with what I found relatable about the author. Perhaps this was in part because of the 'one year' format of the book, edited for space. I would have appreciated fewer lovely vignettes in exchange for deeper reflection on the inevitable, sometimes heartbreaking compromises and conflicts that farming can push one up against. There certainly are enough

how-to books out there. At times the author's voice veers from humility to a sort of eco-pious braggadocio -- that inconsistency makes me think she hadn't quite found her comfort zone within the diverse roles that small scale family farming places one in. But it is her story, and she does tell it for the most part in a self-deprecating tone that I enjoyed. It's a fun look at her transition from city to country. I certainly respect all of the skills she managed to gain in one short year, and the time it took her to write the book while trying to raise a small child and continue to run her farm. Never having tried to put my own experience down in a book - it's easy to be a critic. And when you run a farm -- it can be like living in a fishbowl, so perhaps the emotional omissions are deliberate. Definitely worth reading!

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