

Crunching Gravel: A Wisconsin Boyhood In The Thirties - Robert Louis Peters

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No nostalgic tale of the good old days, Robert Peters's recollections of his adolescence vividly evoke the Depression on a hardscrabble farm near Eagle River: Dad driving the Vilas County Relief truck, Lars the Swede freezing to death on his porch, the embarrassment of graduation in a suit from welfare. The hard efforts to put fish and potatoes and blueberries on the table are punctuated by occasional pleasures: the Memorial Day celebration, swimming at Perch Lake, the county fair with Mothers prizes for jam and the exotic delights of the midway. Peters's clear-eyed memoir reveals a poet's eye for rich and stark detail even as a boy of twelve. Peters misses nothing, from the details of the town's Fourth of July celebration to the cause and effect of a young cousin's suicide to the calibrations of racism toward Indians that was so acceptable then. It is a fascinating, unsentimental look at a piece of our past. Margaret E. Guthrie, New York Times Book Review

It's unlikely that any other contemporary poet and scholar as distinguished has risen from quite so humble beginnings as Robert Peters. Born and raised by semiliterate parents on a subsistence farm in northeastern Wisconsin, Peters lived harrowingly close to the eventual stuff of his poetry: the dependency of humans on animal lives, the inexplicable and ordinary heroism and baseness of people facing extreme conditions, the urgency of physical desire. . . . Sterling childhood memoirs.

Booklist Robert Peters has written a memoir exemplary because he insists on the specific, on the personal and the local. It is also enormously satisfying to read, and it is among the most authentic accounts of childhood and youth I know.

Wisconsin David Copperfield! Thom Gunn

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Louis
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