



Best Person Rural

Noel Perrin

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In 1963, Noel Perrin, a 35-year-old professor of English at Dartmouth College, bought an 85-acre farm in Thetford Center, Vermont. For the next forty years he spent half his time teaching, half writing, and half farming. "That this adds up to three halves I am all too aware," he said, sounding a characteristic, self-deprecating note of bittersweet amusement at the chalk on his coat, the sweat on his brow, and the mud (and worse) on his boots.

"I love this farm," he wrote shortly before his death in 2004, "every acre of it. The maples, the apple trees, the cattle, the wild turkeys. I love the brick farmhouse, which I believe to be about 190 years old ... and the two barns. I love the view from the kitchen window ... and the grander view to be had if you climb Bill Hill, the farm's in-house mini-mountain. The thing that delights me most, though, is that the farm really is a farm. It produces a little food every year, and most years a little fuel as well." It also produced four volumes of essays, beginning with the best-selling *First Person Rural* (1978). Some of Perrin's pieces are practical (how to build a stone wall), others philosophical (why to build a stone wall). One pretends to be about amateur sugar making, but it is really a metaphor for reality and illusion. Another pretends to be about the country as a retreat, but is really about the country as a place to meet the world head-on. One is a dangerous character sketch of a sow – dangerous, because as Roy Blount said after reading it, "It almost made me decide to go ahead and get pigs."

In short, these essays are as good as the literature of farming gets. *Best Person Rural* is a harvest feast, bringing together twenty of Perrin's best-loved pieces and five previously uncollected items, including his moving "Farewell to a Thetford Farm."

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