



The Heart of Things: A Midwestern Almanac

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"I've never believed that living in one place means being one thing all the time, condemned like Minnie Pearl to wear the same hat for every performance. Life is more complicated than that." "

In this remarkable book of days, John Hildebrand charts the overlapping rings--home, town, countryside--of life in the Midwest. Like E. B. White, Hildebrand locates the humor and drama in ordinary life: church suppers, Friday night football, outdoor weddings, garden compost, family reunions, roadside memorials, camouflage clothing. In these wry, sharply observed essays, the Midwest isn't The Land Time Forgot but a more complicated (and vastly more interesting) place where the good life awaits once we figure exactly out what it means. From his home range in northwestern Wisconsin, Hildebrand attempts to do just that by boiling down a calendar year to its rich marrow of weather, animals, family, home--in other words, all the things that matter.

The Heart of Things: A Midwestern Almanac Details

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From Reader Review The Heart of Things: A Midwestern Almanac for online ebook

Arlene says

This almanac consists of brief articles which relate the author's wide-range of lifetime experiences living in the Mid-West. It seems to me that the reading audience who would be most interested in this almanac would be life-time Mid-Westerners who are of the same generation as the author. I qualify in both categories. I was left with a certain kind of longing after reading these reminiscences; perhaps I have a longing for the past and "all the things that matter".

Marsha Herman says

I loved this book. I found myself smiling during every chapter. I may be showing my age, but each story brought back a childhood memory, some which I had forgotten, of growing up in a small town in Wisconsin. It triggered emotions that made me grateful for my experiences and happy that I have lived in such a beautiful place. The writer is witty and poignant--I really look forward to reading more of his books.

Colette says

I heard the first chapter of "Chapter A Day" in the car. I couldn't listen to the rest, but I made sure to look up what book it was the moment I had a chance.

This is new voice for Wisconsin life and culture, one I've been searching for since I moved to Madison and found myself with one foot in my rural roots and the other in a city, wondering what to do. His train of thought about what's going around in the places speaks true to my experience.

Jim Gallen says

"The Heart of Things" is a delightful collection of musings on Midwestern (Wisconsin) living. Originally published as newspaper columns, these essays take the reader through the months, the seasons, and the days of life. Author John Hildebrand entertains the reader with reminiscences of church suppers and compost piles, possums and weasels, deer and turtles, fishing and hunting, urban architecture and rural solitude.

This is a book you can pick-up and read straight through, keep by your chair to peruse when the game is slow or, being organized by months, take just about a section a week throughout the year. The writing style is easy to ponder and enjoy. There are many quotes that hit home but I will just mention one. In the piece entitled "Church Supper" Hildebrand verbalizes the unassailable logic that "Who needs a fancy restaurant when you can go to an elementary school cafeteria and eat wholesome, no-frills food?" Not me. I have gone to those suppers and will appreciate the next one a little bit more. Now excuse me, I think I will reread this month's entries.

I did receive a copy of this book for review.

Clairellyn Sommersmith says

I loved this book. It is so completely about what it is like to live in the Midwest. Hildebrand speaks a truth that I felt but never been able to put into words. I want to buy this book for all my city friends, and say, this! this is what it is like to live in small town Wisconsin. This is what it is like to live.

Rissie says

A collection of essays about life in Wisconsin. It's very well written, but doesn't reflect the Wisconsin that I'm familiar with. I would have liked to see some essays about fish fry or church festivals or bowling leagues or farmer's markets or block parties. I guess I'll have to write my own book.

Eric Rasmussen says

I am biased. Hildebrand was a professor of mine, and I have outsized respect for him and his writing. Nonetheless, I loved this book, perhaps more than his other works. The chapters are bite-sized, which makes the emotion he conjures of the places I know and don't know all the more impressive. He writes simply yet powerfully, and captures my life better than any other midwestern writer that I have read.

Sandy says

Short stories originally published or adapted from his work in "Wisconsin Trails" magazine. He truly captures what small town Midwest living is all about. Perfect Northwoods cabin reading!

Molly says

Sometimes books find you at the exact right moment. I recently moved to Montana from my home state of Wisconsin. Reading this felt like home, even the parts I didn't love. Strong writing, but there might be a lot of sentiment coloring my rating.

Dayeton Tolle says

As a student of teachers and parents who studied under Professor Hildebrand, I approached this book with bias of the great instructor in front of me. That wasn't the only roadblock I had to weave through in order to give this book an honest, whole-hearted judgement of the quality. I am from the town, lived in the town,

GREW up in the town Hildebrand so eloquently writes about. Uh oh. This screams a biased interpretation of the book. However, all of that aside, this book (one of my favorites to date) is the warm cup of coffee one yearns for on a lazy Sunday morning. Embedded with humor, heartfelt stories that will bring a tear to your eye, cold hard facts, iconic places from where I grew up, I loved every page of it. Broken down into small bite-sized chapters, it is a quick and easy read. Quite the page turner. Given to me as a gift from one of my favorite instructors as a going away gift, they instructed me to read it based on the corresponding month it was (ex. reading "May" when it was in May, "January" when it was January), it was the best advice I could have received (even though I broke it after a while, I couldn't put the book down). It made me miss the Wisconsin winters. The local feel of summer in the town you grew up in. The blooming of flowers in May that cover the expanse of Midwest prairies. It is the perfect "pick-me-up" type read when you are missing the place you call "home".

Judy says

I'm Wisconsin born and raised and this memoir definitely struck a few chords with me. This author is coming to the Fox Cities Book Festival in April so we made it our March book club pick.

A few things stood out to me. In an excerpt titled "Small Talk", Hildebrand talks about technology's impact on water cooler chat. He says, "What's lost in the Facebook era is the give - and - take of conversation, the sometime risky choice of words that depend so much on reading the other person's face." I recently 'de-friended' most of my Facebook friends because I was feeling as if nothing was genuine. The other memoir that struck me was "Lifeboat" - all about the fall season and gardening. The thrill of gardening has begun to wear off and the exasperation of harvest is near. Those first fall frosts are a scramble to save plants. Then after nights of working to save things, he says, "Oh, to hell with it!" This is totally my life in October!

This is a neat little book worthy of a place on every WI bookshelf.

Fitchburg Public Library says

Quietly wonderful. Brief essays, organized by season, on rural life in Wisconsin (but hopefully relevant everywhere). This book was featured on WPR's Chapter A Day earlier in spring. I would highly recommend this book (and this author) to fans of Michael Perry...the naturalist/sentimental side more than the humor.

Mary says

The Heart of Things: A Midwestern Almanac was beautifully written. I grew up in Wisconsin, experiencing the four seasons and John Hildebrand captured each month of the year and describes what takes place in nature and the community. It's a fun book to read. It is life in the Midwest. I highly recommend this book.

Yannick Serres says

Shot real life Wisconsin stories. It was my first book in this kind and I got to say that it is definitely not my

kind of reading. It wasn't really by the book that I got disappointed, but more by how it's hard to get into a book that change subject every 2-3 pages.

The book is divided in the 12 months of a year and there is around 3 to 5 stories per month. It is really well written and it's inspiring in it's way. The author knows what he's doing and he gets the work done pretty well. He brings you in his kinda normal life of a little city in Wisconsin and retells moments that marked his life in a way or another.

I've been impressed by how, when you know what you are telling and you know how to tell it, you can make simple normal life events interesting to be read and how you can make other people feel the emotions even if they aren't there.

For people that like this kind of short stories, I really suggest you try 'The Heart of Things' and try not to fall in love with Wisconsin.

I got to thank John Hildebrand and WHS PRESS for given me the opportunity to read this book. I received it through Goodreads giveaways.

Jay says

The Heart of Things
By John Hildebrand

I listen to WPR a ton. Recently I was tuned in to a Larry Meiller show and author Hildebrand was on sharing from his new collection of short stories and I was so impressed. His stories have appeared in the Wisconsin Trails magazine (which is now only available online) and have been organized by seasons into a beautiful book that I think every Wisconsinite should consider reading over the long winter.

With little fanfare and tons and tons of beautiful adjectives, Hildebrand shares his journeys of being so present in the moment I found it hard to stop reading. This is a book that reminds me of a box of chocolates. You need to savor one, then consider the next. Like taking a step forward, finding your way while the sun slowly sets.

“...Given the option, I’ll take a paper map over an electronic navigation system anytime—unless I’m circumnavigating the globe or traversing the Alps—because following a GPS amounts to tunnel vision.”

“Place matters but probably less than other externals like family or friends or work. That’s because the space we carve out for our lives is more about time than geography, and since most lives follow a similar trajectory, it’s reasonable to assume you can be happy (or not) anywhere.”

I’m working on a new novel, as I seem to every winter, and the setting is always a crucial character in my work. Because of that, I noticed a story called ‘Lilacs’ in this collection and it hit me square in my writing-heart. Not only am I intrigued by the reality that an island SW of Eau Claire, in the Chippewa River, now lies in ruins, but that there’s proof of a town. I can now wield my magic adjective-filled keyboard and rediscover place all thanks to Hildebrand’s curious hunger to know more and to listen to his wife’s wisdom.

“Against the canopy of river birch and silver maple, the domestic lilac looked as out of place as a racehorse

among a herd of zebra. How did it get here? I found the answer: a ruined silo and a cellar full of brambles. So the lilac had once shaded a now-vanished farmhouse. Until 1900 farming community had once thrived on the island...Someone had brought the lilac as rootstock to the island and planted it precisely here between farmhouse and river. A woman, my wife, corrected me the next day. A woman would have planted it.”

Is that not the most amazing seed for story? It’s what brings this book together, the weaving of sight and sound, of water dripping off oars, eagle’s wings taking flight, of a river flowing away, how the horizon sits low and hope is found in every sunrise.

These are snippets of us, peeks into our lives as we unfold the starched cloth for Thanksgiving and appreciate all our gifts.
