



Off Main Street: Barnstormers, Prophets & Gatemouth's Gator

By Michael Perry
ISBN: 9780060755508

Introduction

Prior to writing the beloved memoir **Population: 485**, freelance journalist **Michael Perry** wrote essays on such diverse topics as big-rig truck driving, country music, butchery, farming, nursing, and the many fates of small-town America. **Off Main Street: Barnstormers, Prophets & Gatemouth's Gator** is a collection of Perry's off-beat reporting, and is confirmation of his one-of-a-kind world view and deeply personal and humane insights.

In "Branding God," we witness Perry working on a cattle ranch and recalling time spent under the spell of a fire-and-brimstone preacher by the name of Brother Timothy. In "Rolling Thunder," Perry rides with a convoy of Vietnam veterans on their chopper-rigged march to the nation's capital. In such pieces as

"A Way with Wings," "Swelter," and "Manure is Elemental," Perry reflects on his own boyhood, spent in rural Wisconsin amidst the ordinary heroes of the American Midwest.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways are swimming and flying connected in the essay "A Way with Wings?"
2. Many of the essays in **Off Main Street** describe physical work in precise and colorful detail. What are the similarities in the types of work rendered throughout the collection, from pig butchery and music making to truck driving?
3. Which local characters recur throughout these pieces, and what is the overall effect of seeing these people in different contexts, from different angles, and related to different stories?
4. Perry's memoir **Population 485** was anchored to a strong sense of place. In **Off Main Street**, many of the essays speak to freedom, movement, and a love of the road. How well can a convoy of trucks, motorcycles or country music tour buses replicate the feeling of a conventional community? Is sense of place "portable"?
5. Perry often writes about groups of men (think of the truckers in "Convoy;" the veterans in "Roots Remain;" the bikers in "Rolling Thunder"). How does Perry dissect the idea of masculinity itself (think of "Fear This," "Rock Slide!" "Steve Earle: Hard-Core Troubador," "Scarlet Ribbons," and "Hirsute Pursuits" in particular)?
6. How is **Michael Perry** similar to Aaron Tippin and Gatemouth Brown?
7. At the beginning and end of many of the essays, the author has inserted up-to-date, reflective commentary. Do you find this commentary helpful in interpreting the pieces as a whole?
8. Discuss the author's overall presence in the essays. Does his involvement seem consistent? If not, when does he appear and what seems to prompt his appearance? Is he a part of the worlds he documents? What is Perry's role as a writer in these people's lives?

About the Author

Michael Perry was raised on a dairy farm in New Auburn, Wisconsin. In addition to penning the acclaimed memoir **Population: 485**, he has worked as a forklift driver, backhoe operator, truck driver, proofreader, physical therapy aide, and put himself through nursing school by working as a cowboy in Wyoming. His writing has appeared in *Men's Health*, *Esquire*, *Newsweek*, *New York Times Magazine*, *Salon*, *The Utne Reader*, and *No Depression*, among others.

Visit www.sneezingcow.com to e-mail, read updates about, and get more information about **Michael Perry**!