



I Am Hutterite: The Fascinating True Story of a Young Woman's Journey to Reclaim Her Heritage

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A Fascinating journey into the heart and culture of a reclusive religious community.

I Am Hutterite takes readers into the hidden heart of the little-known Hutterite colony in southern Manitoba where author Mary-Ann Kirkby spent her childhood. When she was ten years old her parents packed up their seven children and a handful of possessions and left the security of the colony to start a new life. Overnight they were thrust into a world they didn't understand, a world that did not understand them.

Before she left the colony Mary-Ann had never tasted macaroni and cheese or ridden a bike. She had never heard of Walt Disney or rock-and-roll. She was forced to reinvent herself, denying her heritage to fit in with her peers. With great humor, Kirkby describes how she adapted to popular culture; and with raw honesty her family's deep sense of loss for their community. More than a history lesson, *I Am Hutterite* is a powerful tale of retracing steps and understanding how our beginnings often define us.

Controversial and acclaimed by the Hutterite community, Kirkby's book unveils the rich history and traditions of her people, giving us a rare and intimate portrait of an extraordinary way of life.

I Am Hutterite: The Fascinating True Story of a Young Woman's Journey to Reclaim Her Heritage Details

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From Reader Review I Am Hutterite: The Fascinating True Story of a Young Woman's Journey to Reclaim Her Heritage for online ebook

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I'm back to one of my major 2018 reading goals - to read a bunch from Alaska and Canada. You can't read the prairies of Canada without reading about the Hutterites. I read three books from their own voices, two of which I got from a Canadian reading friend who grew up on the prairies too. (The other two books are Born Hutterite: Stories by Samuel Hofer and Hutterite Diaries: Wisdom from My Prairie Community.

This book had the best writing of the three. Mary-Ann starts with her grandparents' story, continues with her parents' love story and her father's family's contentious history with another Hutterite community, to her childhood within the community. At the age of 10, her parents pack up all the children and leave with barely more than the clothes on their backs, unable to cope with some of the conflicts the father had with the minister. She is dumped into a school system where she doesn't know any pop culture, wears the wrong clothes, eats the wrong food, and doesn't even speak English well yet because her schooling was in High German in the early years.

As an adult, Mary-Ann spent years researching her family, visiting several Hutterite communities, talking to old friends and family members, and using tiny details some would share through a letter or photograph. Every word feels intentional; I actually was curious about what her life was like as an adult but that isn't the story she is telling here. It's clear that she has a deep gratitude for her childhood and wants to preserve it, even if she has not gone back to that way of life. It is powerful to read the confusion of a child who only knows this way of life trying to make sense of the "English" (their word for all non Hutterites) and their strange ways.

Linda says

I was excited to read this book. I have heard about Hutterite communities and was fascinated by what I've heard and I wanted to learn more. What better way than by someone that lived there?

Part one told of Ann-Marie's family before she was born. She writes about the history of Hutterite communities and how they ended up in Fairholme. There was a lot of time spent on traditions and clothing and food and general expectations of Hutterites. She wrote about how her mother ended up marrying her father, she describes her aunts and uncles, cousins, etc..

Part two, Ann-Marie writes about her life growing up in the community. Again she writes about the traditions and expectations, her happy childhood, and the amazing food they ate. She makes it sound like heaven. A protected and provided for sanctuary. An amazing place for the elders, and retired Hutterites. She rarely speaks negatively about anything. Is this a realistic painting of the community? I would love to know!

Part three, after they left the community. Her style of writing was a bit shallow and underdeveloped in this section. She gets the message through that it was a very hard transition, but again, everything seems to be described with rose-colored glasses.

Sadly there should have been a part four, telling us about her adult life. I was waiting to hear how she became a writer and how she started her career in television. Her book doesn't go into that.

All and all, a very quick and easy read, loved having the family tree and Hutterite glossary in the back. I will be passing the book on to others I feel might find it as interesting as I did.

Courtney Oppel says

Having grown up seeing the local Hutterites flood the box stores once a month and sell their highly praised produce at farmer's markets during the summer, I couldn't resist picking up a book written by a Hutterite, in which she provides vignettes of her life. Kirkby's story is a welcome glimpse into this otherwise closed society, and she talks of her community with openness, honesty, and respect. I appreciated learning about the history and current make-up of these communities, as well as their customs and traditions.

Jade Lauron says

A little sticker shocked at first, ten bucks for a book just over 200 pages long? I decided I'd return it if I wasn't quite pleased with the book. I also thought Hutterites were some kind of Amish offshoot, which only goes to show you how totally ignorant I was.

So I learned quite a bit, and I've decided to keep the book, even though I still think the price is a bit steep. It's a good book, but still a seven dollar good book. On the other hand, since it's probably the only book she writes, and since I understand very well that authors place more value in their autobiographies than readers do, I'll pay. After all, can you really put a price on knowledge and an end to ignorance?

Hutterites are basically Christian communists. They live in small communal groups, they work together, eat all meals together, pray together, and share their property. In fact, the very basis of their society is communal life. They use their strong faith and a series of very sensible traditions to bind together. Like many communist societies, it's weakness tends to be the weakness of the individual. One man's greed can make the society fall apart. However, unlike other communist societies where atheism is the norm, here faith, along with the fact that each group is kept small, hopes to mitigate this. While one group may fail, others may thrive.

However there seem to be inconsistencies that the book doesn't address. Hutterites do avoid certain worldly things, like televisions and radios, things they deem unnecessary. However, they both use and can probably fix tractors. But, they are all farmers, not factory workers; they don't build tractors. Hutterites go to hospitals and are dependent on modern medicine, but they don't go off to become doctors. So if only Hutterites go to heaven, what of the doctors and others upon which their lifestyle depends? It's just seems oddly incongruent, that for a few to go to heaven, some must therefore be destined to hell. But the author was young when she left that society, even though she visits often. I wish I knew more. I wish the book explained more than 200 pages could provide.

Some of the traditions were mighty sensible, but I'm still glad I'm not a Hutterite. It wouldn't suit me, as it wouldn't suit anyone who didn't fit exactly into the role cast for them. What tragedy would befall a gay Hutterite? Or any other misfit, really. I shudder to think.

Sheila says

Interesting, yet somehow lacking.

I admit I was interested in learning about the Hutterite people, and their way of life. This book is written by a woman who was raised as a Hutterite until her parents left the community when she was 10 years old. Then we learn of her struggles to fit into the "English" world, where even things as simple as mayonnaise are foreign to her.

In the end though this book just seemed to peter out, without any real wrap up or conclusion. Maybe that is how her life was. She just slowly became "English" and her Hutterite life faded away.

It almost seems this book was written more for her son, for a family memoir, to let him know of the history of his grandparents and great grandparents. If this had been my family I would have been grateful that the story was saved. But for me, and unrelated reader, it was just lacking in the end.

DeB MaRtEnS says

I'm waffling a bit on the rating I've given this one- more like a 3.5, but parts of it had 5 star quality. Very interesting reading about the Hutterites, who, though I've seen them at times shopping and driven by their large farms, I knew virtually nothing about.

As with a number of different European groups who pulled away from Catholicism in the 1500's when Protestantism was rising with the likes of Martin Luther, and who were being burned alive for heresy, those who came to be known as Hutterite eventually left. They were among many, like the Mennonites, who fled to Ukraine in the 1600- 1700s where Catherine the Great was trying to stabilize her holdings against the rise of Ukrainian nationalism, and who offered them land and sanctuary. When they lost their military exemption, in 1770, they sought a new home. In 1874, they arrived in New York and from there went on to settle in "Colonies" in South Dakota, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The new arrivals continued on with their lives, following the original tenets of Jacob Hutter and his group of Anabaptists, their faith based centrally on Acts 2: 44-45:

"And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

Mary Ann Kirkby tells, wistfully, of her childhood in her Hutterite Colony in Southern Manitoba, Canada. The system of managing the needs of its Colony had evolved into a practical efficient model, utilized by every North American Hutterite Colony. Breakfast and dinner were eaten communally, while lunch was the only meal that families ate together.

"Regardless of age or capacity, each member had a station to fill and meaningful work to do. No one received a salary but everyone's needs were met. Sharing a common faith, most Colony members were satisfied with a sustainable lifestyle that nurtured them physically and spiritually from cradle to grave.

Everyone ate, worked and socialized together for the good of all. Women did the cooking, baking and gardening while the men carried out the farming, mechanical and carpentry chores."

Kirkby recalls a community that nurtured its children and worked to maintain its social equanimity. The Hutterite dress code, unchanged since the 1500s, was one of comfort and modesty with its long floral skirts, blouses, vests, aprons and polka dotted head scarves. Men, depending on the conservatism of the colony, might have pants with front openings with hidden hooks and eyes, visible buttons, or a hidden side opening, and always wore hats. Once married, men grew beards to show their status.

With their prosperous farms and gardens and fantastic home cooks, everyone was fed with fresh food, and baking from recipes sometimes four hundred years old. When the children were in school, their communal meal or "essenschul" was hearty, and if they wanted more of something, they simply called out for it. The concept of stealing was completely foreign to them; if buns, pickles, pies etc., were out on a counter, they were for everyone.

But human beings still can be human beings, and hold grudges. Mary Ann's mother had fallen in love with and was eventually given permission to marry Ron Dornn, whose family had a bit of a contorted church history. Jake Maendal, head minister and brother to Mary Ann's mother was angry that she did not accept his choice for her, and his begrudging behaviour cost the Dornn family dearly.

Kirkby's recounting of the years following her father's departure from the Colony continue to have the wistful voice of the ten year old girl, one who can't quite accept what she has lost by her parents' actions and who isn't sure that the payoff has been worth their trade. Through a dear Hutterite girlfriend's letter, who is vacillating wilding over leaving or staying in her home colony, Mary Ann suddenly sees that freedom of choice isn't where you live, but an inside job.

I would have liked to read more about the Colony and how it operates, how it's people feel, how it spends its profits, confront the issue of shoplifting and thoughts about their future - a bit more "adult" overview.

But, a worthwhile read. And, they make homemade wine, unlike the Amish and Mennonites.

Heather says

About twenty pages into this book I wasn't sure I was going to like it, but by page 50 I was hooked and I had a hard time putting it down. I was drawn to this book because I like reading about things that are different from what I know or experience. I think the author has a unique viewpoint, having lived the Hutterite way of life and then living in the world as I know it.

I found reading about a culture that I knew nothing about so interesting. I live in a province that has a lot of Hutterites in it, I even lived and worked in towns where they were seen everyday, but I surprised myself with how much I didn't know about them. I didn't even realize it until I started reading this book.

I really enjoyed getting an inside look into colonies in the 60's and 70's. I've never been to one, so I had no idea what they're like. I'm sure they've changed a bit from the ones described in the book, but I still found it really interesting.

I had never really thought about what it would be like to have one life and then leave, and try to fit in to the "outside world" that is so different from the one you're used to. It sounds like a pretty scary thing to do, especially at ten years old. The closest thing that I would be able to compare it to in my life was the two moves that I went through when I was nine and fourteen. I went through three different provinces in five years, and it was TOUGH. I can only imagine the change that Mary-Ann had to go through.

I loved the message this book gave me - that no matter what language we speak, what we wear, or our faith, in the end we're all just people. It's so easy to separate ourselves into "us" and "them", when really, we're more similar than we know.

Homeschoolmama says

This was a wonderfully rich read, with lots of honest gritty details about the author's childhood living in a Hutterite colony ~replete with descriptions of the food, the constant companionship of the fellow Hutterite families, (most of which were large, with 7+ kids each), the banter and teasing, the unique clothing and the prayer meetings and leadership. Kirkby describes a happy childhood, where there is always an abundance of food and an abundance of things to do. There are many chores and the life is very structured, but she felt security therein and did not want to leave. When she is 10, her parents decide to leave the colony and strike out on their own.

Although Kirkby's transition to 'English' life is hard, she tells the story with grace. Kirkby does not pass over some of the rigid teachings however; she does not gloss over the harsh, power-hungry uncle's leadership and its terrible consequences. And the tragedies that befall them and other families.

I enjoyed learning about her experience and recommend this book to anyone who is interested in firsthand accounts of people living in alternative communities.

Karen Chung says

This book was a sheer delight to read. Part of the reason may be because I grew up in a family still quite connected to our German roots, and I learned some German at home and in school; I'd also read a bit about the Hutterites when I was very young. But it was also eyeopening to read about somebody who was born and grew up Canada, but who eventually ended up experiencing mainstream North American culture like a foreigner in her own country.

The descriptions of life in a Hutterite family and colony were fascinating and full of honest humanity. I enjoyed learning about their work, their clothing, how they organized their lives, worshiped, and had fun. Radios, make-up, even photographs were considered too worldly and were not allowed. Families were large - a woman's highest duty in life was to marry and become a mother, over and over and over again. Their food was heavy and rich, and they really had a sweet tooth - no wonder people put on weight! But they were also very physical and athletic - it was fun to see how a few siblings (when later living on the outside) wiped out all the others in their class in a baseball game, through both skill and strategy. In the process they finally won for themselves some begrudging acceptance among their Anglo peers in school - though nobody would ever play against them again after that. The family's encounter with black West Indian houseguests was a hoot!

It was a long-festering family rift that led first to tragedy, then to the author's father deciding to leave the colony for good and strike out in his own, in spite of being forced to start over with almost nothing. I still find myself wondering if Jake's (the one behind the strained family relations) appeal for forgiveness on his deathbed really happened, or was just invented by somebody to console the author's family.

I don't often give five stars these days, but this is a book I couldn't put down and didn't want to end.

Randi S says

<http://thesclub.blogspot.com/2010/06/...>

What's a Hutterite? Don't worry, I had no idea either. Judging the book by it's cover (I know, how awful of me), I figured it was a community of people like the Amish or Mennonite.

I was wrong and I was right. Of course the Hutterites are a community of people with the same religious, moral, and all other values. They dress the same. Their community is focused around their faiths (an anabaptist faith like Amish and Mennonite). And they are only found in certain parts of the world (US and Canada - although they did originate in Europe so maybe there are some sects there?).

However, the Hutterites are even more communal than the Amish & Mennonite. They literally have one big kitchen and dining room for everyone (separate for children & adults). They have a big kindergarten (more like our daycare) and school (although children attend both "English" and Hutterite school).

I just wanted to give you a bit (very tiny bit) of background before I told you about this book. "I Am Hutterite" is the brainchild of author Mary-Ann Kirkby. Her son asked her if she was Hutterite while they were visiting her brother's grave in a Hutterite community. This question took her on a quest to come to terms with the life she left behind at age 10.

Kirkby shares an extensive genealogy of both her maternal and paternal families. The maternal side traces back to the original Hutterites in Austria. Her paternal side chose this community after fleeing from Europe before WWII. The families did not stay in a single community for the extent of time written about. Some chose to go to a new community, some were voted to a new community.

The author also writes about when the political tension in her immediate family's community became so high (mostly due to a stubborn uncle who was the community leader) that her parents chose to leave the Hutterite communities altogether. They took their seven children to find a new (free) life.

Of course, hardship incurred (trying to feed so many mouths was not an easy task). The children tried to assimilate themselves into popular culture (in the '60s) while their parents clung hard to many things Hutterite (dress, morals).

I was intrigued by the cover of this book, realizing it had to be about some sort of certain community. I have read Beverly Lewis novels about Amish and Mennonites, although I know very little about any actual communities as such (although there are some Amish families near here). I loved Kirkby's writing; you are drawn in to her story as if it were a story you've read a million times. It's a comfortable feel to the book like that. You feel like you know her family and friends.

This is the type of book that makes you wonder what life would be like in a commune. Reading through her child eyes, the closeness of community and family sounds wonderful. The work doesn't sound as back-breaking as I'm sure it was. You can feel her loss when her family departs from everything she's ever known.

My only complaint about this book is that it sort of stops suddenly. The epilogue is vague (unlike the rest of the book) so you're wanting for more specifics about what happened next. How did Mary-Ann end up where she is; what was the rest of her life like? I felt left in the dark, like a great movie with a horrible ending. Otherwise, a really good read that takes you to a place you otherwise may not have known existed.

BUY IT: You can find "I Am Hutterite" on Amazon.com for as little as \$14.

Carol says

This book is very special to me. I love what Mary-Ann Kirby says in this book '...for it is only when we embrace our past that we can find true fulfillment in our future' (p.228). Her statement spells out the reason for my own search for my family's beginnings.

Mary Ann was invited by a friend to write a magazine article about Hutterite gardens. But it turned into a journey into past starting with her Hutterite beginnings. Her family lived in a Hutterite colony in southern Manitoba, Canada. Hutterites were one of three groups that sprang from the Anabaptists: the Amish, Hutterites and Mennonites. I enjoyed her journey, sometimes troubled, sometimes joyful so much. She lived the Hutterite life but by reflection, she learned so much. It is my hope to trace my Mennonite ancestors and learn their way of life so I can better understand my ancestors and myself.

The core difference between the two other groups and the Hutterites was the belief in no personal possessions, that started with its Austrian founder, Jacob Hutterite and is still followed in the Hutterite colonies today in Canada and United States. Strangely, this principal of no personal possessions led to why her family in their good conscience had to decide whether or not to leave. Not because of a desire to obtain and keep things but because of importance of human life.

There is so much to learn from this book, the true meaning of freedom, the traditions of clothing, cleanliness, humor, drinking, singing, and the expressions. A unmarried woman is spoken of as 'a jar that hadn't yet found its lid' (p. 37) The tradition of giving a daughter at the age of 15, a wooden hope chest (my father did this too). The special treatment that a woman who has just born a baby receives. I could go on but I would spoil the book for you.

This book captures you at the beginning and won't let you go. I will keep it on my bookshelf for reference in the future and I hope to re-read it. It is beautifully written and from some accounts of family past come big treasures of meaning.

I invite everyone interested in the past, in their own ancestry, in religion, in ways of life to read and enjoy this book.

Saloma Miller says

A Hutterite Story

It was several years after I left the Amish that I first heard about Hutterites through a magazine article. At the time I was astonished that there could be a third branch of Anabaptists that I had never heard about during my 23 years of living in an Amish community. (The other two are Amish and Mennonites). Since then I have read more articles about Hutterites, but I was always left wanting for more information, which left an air of mystery and intrigue around them -- I imagine much the same way most people feel about the Amish. Except maybe even more so, for unlike the Amish, the Hutterites live on cloistered colonies, which does not include anyone who is not Hutterite. After learning about this culture, I wished I knew someone who grew up on a Hutterite colony, or at least that I'd have the opportunity to read a story by a Hutterite.

I found just such a story when I recently read "I Am Hutterite" by Mary-Ann Kirkby. In this beautifully rendered story, she serves her readers a slice of life on the colony from her perspective of a young child after her mother had given birth to a younger sibling:

"As soon as she arrived home from the hospital, Mother entered die Wuchen, a six-week period of special treatment extended to women after the birth of each child. This included a nine-week exemption from colony duty. Peterana was the cook for nursing mothers, and she delivered delicacies to our house every day. Rich foods like "Nukkela Suppen" (buttery dumplings), waffles soaked in whiskey, and plump cuts of chicken were carried over from the community kitchen in bowls and stainless-steel pails. While the rest of the colony ate regular fare at the long tables in the community kitchen, Mother had the privilege of inviting family and friends to dine with her at home. Most often, her guest of choice was my father."

Mary-Ann Kirkby is a gifted storyteller. I am with her in Kindergarten, which she started, as all other Hutterite children at age two and a half, when they began their religious training. She describes the soft, fresh buns after dipping them into "Schmond Wacken" (cream) with generous dollops of jam that she enjoyed for breakfast, and the stories, songs and games she participated in. I am with her when she and the other children went on outings to see the geese or visit the colony gardens. I feel as though her memories and mine meld when she describes opening the pods in the pea patch and pulling baby carrots from the ground.

Kirkby's childhood was as nearly idyllic as a child's can be. I love the way she sets the background for the day her life was to change forever when she was ten years old:

"Across the western sky, the rich red, orange, and gold tones of a spectacular Manitoba sunset were bringing the soft summer day to a close. We felt spoiled by its beauty in Fairholme, for over and over again, even in the harshest of winters, we were treated to its splendor. Against this magic expanse of space, I was playing dodgeball with the children from the "Essenschul." We all had the giggles, and our laughter infected a group of adults who had come to watch... I, as wide as was tall, kept eluding the ball....

"Above the merriment, a voice pierced the warm air..."

I won't spoil the story, but I will say that life on the colony was less than idyllic for Mary-Ann's father. And here is where I actually identify with Mary-Ann's parents for the tough choice they had to make, even though

I know that life for Mary-Ann and her siblings was about to change... and not necessarily for the better.

"I Am Hutterite" is a wonderfully sensual story about Hutterite life, which does exactly what I thought such a story would... it brings Hutterites down to earth and puts a human face on them.

The same way that Kirkby's childhood story is nearly idyllic, so is this book nearly perfect. But I have three criticisms.

1. There is a subtitle on this book, "The fascinating true story of a young woman's journey to reclaim her heritage." There was only a very small portion of Kirkby's story that pertained to this, so I feel like this subtitle is not very accurate. And to that end, I wonder if Kirkby isn't trying to have it both ways... claim she is Hutterite, while still enjoying the personal freedom she would have to sacrifice if she were to actually rejoin life on the colony. Perhaps it comes of those good memories of her Hutterite childhood.
2. I love the first 198 pages of this book, but then Kirkby "summarizes" the rest of her story and wraps up loose ends much too quickly. I would have preferred that she save this part of her story for a sequel, so that she could tell the story in the same sensual details with which she had told her story thus far.
3. I read somewhere on Kirkby's website that she learned the art of telling stories from life on the colony. I felt I missed something, because I would have loved to have "been there" during a story-telling session.

Perhaps Kirkby did learn how to fashion a good story from her people, but I cannot believe that all her talent comes from observing the masters -- I am willing to bet that she was born with her gift for storytelling that was then nurtured in her original community. Either way, I am glad she used her talent to bring us the story, "I Am Hutterite." It carries an important message about a little-known culture in North America.

Note: The spell checker recognizes "Amish" or "Mennonite," but it doesn't recognize "Hutterite." I know there is much intrigue about foreign "exotic" cultures, but I find it interesting that we in North America don't know the Hutterites well enough to have the name of their culture show up as a valid word in our lexicon.

Coyle says

So first, a caveat: at first glance, this is totally a chick book. I started reading it because, well, it was free (see the legal jargon below) and I am a fan of book books and freeness. The blurb on the back cover and the various promotions given make it seem as if the book is about a young girl's struggle to fit in to "English" society after leaving a Hutterite colony in Canada.

However, that was not the case at all. The book is instead mostly a narrative of life as a Hutterite. Of the 235 pages of the book, roughly the last hundred deal with life off of the colony, and most of those are recollections of Hutterite life. So a much more accurate way to describe the book would be: this is a description of life in a Hutterite colony, as told by someone who lived there until she was ten, then left and adapted into mainstream society.

And, I might add, a very well-written description. Kirkby tells her story with wit and ease, leading the reader gently through an unfamiliar language and an unfamiliar culture. And that really is essential, because most of us cannot imagine a culture where

Whoever cannot give up his private property as well as his own self-will cannot become a disciple and follower of Christ. The ungodly go each their own egotistical way of greed and

profit. To such we should not be conformed.(45)

In a culture where both property and self-will are worshipped, we would find it jarring to encounter a place where

Everyone ate, worked, and socialized together for the good of all. Women did the cooking, baking, and gardening while men carried out the farming, mechanical, and carpentry chores. (62-63)

Kirkby laces her narrative with charming stories that off-set the unusual setting and really show that Hutterites differ in dress but not in character from everyone else. For example, she tells a story that had been relayed to her

Hutterite dresses didn't have pockets, so most of the women used their bras to store small items such as hairpins, safety pins, and Kleenex. Esther... carried tea bags and sugar lumps this way too. When an outsider had dropped in to see Esther's husband, she sent one of her children for him and offered the stranger a cup of tea, nonchalantly pulling a tea bag and two sugar lumps from her bosom. When she asked whether he took cream, the flabbergasted businessman jumped out of his chair and cried, 'No thanks!' as he fled the scene.

Finally, two major things from the book that made me stop and think are:

- 1) No one is made holy by being a Hutterite. They're just people. People with a different lifestyle, but people nonetheless. They have problems, personality conflicts, and the thousand big and small difficulties that confront all of us every day.
- 2) We really need to reconsider our ideas of freedom. It's fascinating to think that the family felt free living under Hutterite rules (which would make most of us modern Americans scream with frustration) and oppressed when forced to try to figure out how to live in mainstream culture: "I was the happy Hutterite girl, free from the dress codes and protocol of the English world." (175)

Overall, this is a very well-written and enjoyable book. Highly recommended.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from Thomas Nelson Publishers as part of their BookSneeze.com book review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255

LaRae says

This year, it being the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to Wittenberg chapel, I listened to a month-long podcast on heroes of the Reformation. This led to my learning of Jacob Hutter an Anabaptist (re-baptizer) who was burned at the stake because of his insistence on adult baptism. His teaching on community living, and sharing all possessions in common, sparked an interest in learning more about the Hutterites. I knew some of both the Amish and the Mennonites, but nothing of this group.

This memoir was written by a woman whose family abruptly left their Hutterite colony for the outside world when she was 10. I found it both interesting, and a little heartbreaking, as she describes her struggle to adjust from a comfortable, easy life (where everyone worked hard, but all needs were provided for), to a life of

fending for themselves (where everyone worked hard, and yet they clawed and scrimped and went without just to survive).

Lacey Louwagie says

Krystl tempered her bad review of this book by stating that it wasn't the type of book she'd usually read, which is a fair qualification. Unfortunately, I also found this book to be below average, and it IS the type of book I like to read. I've been particularly drawn to memoirs lately, but this one falls short.

I picked the book up because there's a large Hutterite colony near where Ivan grew up in South Dakota (I found out from this book that it was actually the first Hutterite colony established in North America). Like any minority group, rumors about their practices and beliefs abound. I wanted to read this book because I thought it would give me a less prejudiced, more authentic understanding of this population of people. And to its credit, it did do that. I know more about day-to-day life in a Hutterite community than I really needed or wanted to.

I suspected within the first disc that this book had started its life self-published, and I was right. Although it is reasonably well written -- the author is a journalist by profession -- it suffers from a lot of unnecessary adjectives and adverbial phrases that make the writing feel sloppy. But its biggest issue is the fact that it lacks a dramatic narrative arc. Rather than reading like a memoir, which follows a certain theme in the author's life, this feels like merely a collection of reminiscences about growing up Hutterite. Very few characters are well developed, and those that are feel romanticized (as does most of the experience of growing up Hutterite). Many characters are not mentioned at all until something dramatic happens with them, and at that point we don't care because we haven't gotten to know them. And while the story DOES have the potential to follow a clear narrative arc -- it covers her father's friction with the colony's leader, which eventually led the family to leave -- the pacing is all wrong, with the story meandering off into more day-to-day descriptions of life just when there's the opportunity to heighten the tension after a key incident.

Mary-Ann Kirkby talks about how she's written the book for her son, and really, that's where this book feels most appropriate: as a chronicle of a way of life for loved ones or descendants who have a personal connection to it. As a story meant to appeal to the general public, it falls unfortunately short.
