



An Hour Before Daylight : Memoirs of a Rural Boyhood

Jimmy Carter

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In an American story of enduring importance, Jimmy Carter re-creates his Depression-era boyhood on a Georgia farm, before the civil rights movement that changed it and the country.

In what is sure to become a classic, the bestselling author of *Living Faith* and *Sources of Strength* writes about the powerful rhythms of countryside and community in a sharecropping economy. Along the way, he offers an unforgettable portrait of his father, a brilliant farmer and strict segregationist who treated black workers with his own brand of "separate" respect and fairness, and his strong-willed and well-read mother, a nurse who cared for all in need -- regardless of their position in the community.

Carter describes the five other people who shaped his early life, only two of them white: his eccentric relatives who sometimes caused the boy to examine his heritage with dismay; the boyhood friends with whom he hunted with slingshots and boomerangs and worked the farm, but who could not attend the same school; and the eminent black bishop who refused to come to the Carters' back door but who would stand near his Cadillac in the front yard discussing crops and politics with Jimmy's father.

Carter's clean and eloquent prose evokes a time when the cycles of life were predictable and simple and the rules were heartbreaking and complex. In his singular voice and with a novelist's gift for detail, Jimmy Carter creates a sensitive portrait of an era that shaped the nation.

An Hour Before Daylight is destined to stand with other timeless works of American literature.

An Hour Before Daylight : Memoirs of a Rural Boyhood Details

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From Reader Review An Hour Before Daylight : Memoirs of a Rural Boyhood for online ebook

Sandra says

The first election I remember was Jimmy Carter's. I was in 3rd grade, & I voted for him in a mock election at school. Ford received only one vote in our class, so Carter won by a landslide! Also that same year, I wrote a letter to President Carter & received a photo of his family standing in front of the White House. I can still see in my mind his signature stamped on the front & little Amy standing in the front row in a white sundress. I'd give anything if I still had that picture!

Obviously I chose this book because I was a Carter fan from the beginning. I wanted to know more about the man I idolized when I was young. I remembered Habitat for Humanity & the way Carter continued to do good deeds long after he left the presidency.

I learned many fascinating facts in this book, things I never picked up or would have understood as a child. For instance, despite growing up in Georgia during a time that slavery was an acceptable thing, Carter's father died in the arms of the Black woman who had taken care of his children. She had traveled to be with him while he was dying. Jimmy Carter's mother was a nurse who didn't seem to care about social norms concerning racism, & she would care for Black people when they were sick accepting whatever they wanted to offer her instead of money.

Racism during the time of Carter's childhood is only one aspect of this great book. If you liked Jimmy Carter at all, you'll enjoy learning about his life in this memoir.

Todd says

The rural South in which Jimmy Carter grew up was a world increasingly unfamiliar to contemporary people. Carter's memoir will prove more and more valuable as time passes.

Anna Hardin says

Don't let politics keep you from reading this memoir. Excellent!

Maggie says

This well written memoir is essentially a slice of Jimmy Carter's life until he leaves for Annapolis in his Sophomore year of college. He shows you what his day-to-day life was like on his farm in Archery (a town which no longer exists) and at home and in school in Plains, and also gives you the background for his ancestors and his knowledge of and memories of his grandparents and parents.

What I found most fascinating was Jimmy Carter's view into every day life on his farm in the South during the depression. How they worked, what the economics was for him and the sharecroppers and day laborers on the farm and for his friends (all black), and what the social and political situations were.

Of course, Jimmy Carter could only report what he remembered and certainly his view would have been tempered by what was normal to him as opposed to how those same events would have been shared by his black neighbors, but he clearly tries to give us as much of their view as possible and also tries to see his childhood and the childhoods of his friends through adult eyes so that we can see how their lives differed from his. I thoroughly enjoyed this memoir of Georgia in the 30s and 40s. Recommended.

John Mitchell Dees, Jr. says

An autobiographical history lesson of rural southern life

I have never been disappointed with President Carter's writings. This book is no different. He paints such a detailed look at life in rural Georgia that you feel like he is there with you telling this story. He describes farm life, family issues, slowly getting more responsibilities on the farm, having fun with friends, church functions, community functions, and growing up during segregation that he never really understood until he was a teenager. This wonderful book will give you a true insight into the family members, people, places, and events that helped shape our 39th president into the person he is today. It is also a great historical record documenting life during the 1920s through the 1970s. It is a very pleasant book to read.

Heila says

Very interesting - I really had almost no idea about the childhood years of this particular past president of ours. His responsibilities and freedom as a boy (for example selling on main street boiled peanuts which he prepared himself at age 5) are things which are almost completely foreign to us in our present society. Super-interesting in terms of what he did later in life, to hear of his boyhood exploits. His relationships (or lack of) with his parents and siblings - and his other relationships through the eyes of a Southern child, with loved ones of different races - all of this was very revealing and thought-provoking in terms of the times. The writing was good. I listened to this on tape, narrated by him, and his voice is sometimes a little lacking expression I thought - but it was fun to hear his soft accent especially on some words. This book was a window into a time and place, into one small person's world. That small person having lived as a barefoot sharecropper's son, smack in the middle of the pre-civil rights South and then becoming one of our country's highest leaders. By the way, he often had his nose in a book as a boy. It was also interesting to me to read this because of the fact that he is probably our most successful EX-president.

Bernie says

This memoir was written Jimmy Carter the former US President. It focuses on his childhood in Plains Georgia up until the time he left to go to college. I'm not one for reading biographies but found the book in library on a cruise ship. It written in a very readable style and presents a series of anecdotes from in and around the farm where he was raised. It is a story of growing up in the great depression. Although Carter does acknowledge that they did not do too badly.

He dedicates the memoir to his grandson or perhaps great grandson. It is with some sadness that he acknowledges that after 6 generations he is the last on the forma with his children and grandchildren having moved away from rural life. The memoir is an attempt to tell the story of his childhood.

He does write a lot about racial segregation and the ways that people skirted around it to continue their lives.

Georgia is in the south of the US so it's hardly surprising that this is the case. The remnants of this still influence the US to this day.

After the abolition of slavery making "all men free" the decisions were challenged in the US Supreme court. This led to a judgement of "equal but separate" the most obvious example of this that black children were denied a public education. Rather than being taught in public schools their education was hidden in church halls and scratching for resources. However as a child Carter accepted this as the norm.

I read this quickly and found it an interesting and instructive read. I have always felt that Carter was a more humane US president and this does not dispel that notion.

Needhi says

its ok...i've read better depression era memoirs and his take on race relations in that era seemed a bit romanticized and naive to me. he acknowledges the racism that black people he grew up with must have suffered but complains about the loss of familiarity between blacks and whites today, as if that was not influenced by the power dynamic that must have existed. this is especially true given that most of the black people he grew up with worked for or rented land from his father.

Dora says

What a privilege to step inside the childhood of one of the most extraordinary living Americans. This is easily in the top 5 books I've read in 2011.

(by the way: I feel like this book never got the press it deserved because it came out late 2001... oops).

I wasn't expecting to read this in 48 hours... and yet, I couldn't put it down. This book, a collection of memories from Carter's upbringing in rural Georgia during the depression, paints such a vivid picture of that time and place in America that it's a valuable read for anyone even if you don't admire Jimmy Carter as much as I do.

I feel like I now understand so much more about the economics and culture of agriculture during that time, and the social landscape of segregation. Carter spent much of his boyhood at the kitchen tables of Black sharecroppers on his family farm, and the writing employs subtlety to demonstrate what that relationship was like. I learned so much about the long-held resentment towards the North that families harbored since the Civil War-- not just that they held these feelings but the way it manifested in their daily lives and culture.

The writing is fantastic. Carter (or his ghostwriter) exercises some restraint; while at times I wished there was more in-depth discussion on how these experiences influenced him, I appreciated the simple narrative style, leaving the reader to draw his/her own conclusions. This style made the book more like a collection of simple vignettes about a boy on a farm, except the reader remains thinking about the deeper meaning after reading.

The very last line of the book made me cry, thinking about the way the world changes and how we need to accept that, rather than clinging to our personal histories. I just loved this book, cover to cover.

Jennifer Ochoa says

This was my second read. Something about being pregnant makes me want to read about great men, and regardless of what you think about his time as POTUS, Carter is a great humanitarian and champion of equality. It's a simple, meandering memoir about his childhood. An easy read for when nausea kept me from reading more than a half page at a time. Lovely in its recollections of the people who influenced him, the charm and struggle of farm life, but honest in his portrayal of race relations in the South, pre-Civil right's movement (the title is a metaphor for that time).

Alex Marshall says

Jimmy Carter is our best writer of any of our living presidents, including Mr. Barack Obama. It's simply amazing how good Mr. Carter is as a writer. His prose is sparse, lean and simple. He shows, not tell. It's simple enough for a 10 year old, yet powerful enough for 100 year old. His portrait of his childhood and early adulthood in and around Plains is powerful. I was struck with how rich his life was, much more so than that of kids today. His life was immersed in farm, country, family, school and friendship. It was also more dangerous, with rabies, hookworm and many other ailments always threatening. He came from a prosperous farm, so it was more striking at how medieval his life was. His family farm, in the late 1930s, had no running water, no sewers, no electricity. His father plowed with a plow and a mule. No tractors. Light was from kerosene lamps. Water from wells. Amazing. Things have changed.

Mrs. Tongate says

A memoir of Jimmy Carter's childhood growing up in Plains, Georgia. The audiobook is read by Jimmy Carter and makes the book.

Ryan says

Finally, a book almost as boring as the Carter presidency itself! Typically, I'm a sucker for books about the south, rural living and the lifestyles of presidents. This story combines all three, and the ex-president almost seems to make it an effort to be dry. Carter, the son of a southwest Georgia landowner, grew up amongst sharecroppers in the desperately poor depression years. In no romantic terms, he traces his upbringing, and the best parts of his book focus on the relationships with and personalities of those around him — notably, his parents, black tenants and their children. When Carter steers toward the minutiae of farm life, it screeches to a halt, with extraneous details about his chores. Carter also invites gentle ribbing about his tall tale-ish, moral parables — you'd think he was the most noble of children to grace the state of Georgia. Anyway, there are some decent parts, including some thoughts on the realities of living in time when racial discrimination was an accepted way of life.

Keith Madsen says

I re-read this book for a presentation I do on "Biographies of People of Faith." This is a very well-written autobiography. For persons who believe that a white person being raised in the rural South automatically makes a person a racist, this book serves as an excellent counter-example. Jimmy Carter was raised around tiny Plains, Georgia. Most of his playmates were black children, and two of the adults he was closest to (and whose home he often stayed at) were a black couple who helped on their farm. As an adult his business was boycotted by racist groups because he encouraged blacks to vote and own land. As President he proclaimed "a New South" which was moving beyond its racist past (While a backlash is currently evident, strong voices for racial understanding still exist, partly the result of Carter's legacy.) Being raised in the South during tough economic times (the depression) also made him sensitive to the needs of the poor, an attitude later expressed in his work for Habitat for Humanity. After establishing the Carter Center with wife Rosalyn, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002. While there are varying opinions on the effectiveness of Jimmy Carter's Presidency, there is a widespread belief that he might be the most influential, respected ex-President we have ever had.

Rena Sherwood says

Take all of the preconceptions you have of former President Jimmy Carter and lock them in a dark closet somewhere. Just read this book as if you only vaguely know that the author was at one time a one-term American President. Go into the book not expecting anything -- except a good read.

A strange yet fascinating word portrait of a lost time when blacks and dirt-poor white farm kids worked and played together in Georgia. It's more focused on an overlooked time in American history and Southern history at that than a memoir of the boyhood of a most unlikely candidate for President. It's one of those books you can get lost in.

I haven't read other history books about Georgia in that time or talked to anyone who lived in Georgia at that time so I do not know how accurate Carter's memories are. But I do know that this book was a pleasant surprise. I thought it was too short, which means it's just the right length.
