Farm Boys
Fellows, Will

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Jahred Boyd

Born in 1959, Jahred grew up on a mixed livestock and grain farm in northwestern Minnesota. He lives on a small hobby farm near Webster, Minnesota. His partner of nearly ten years, Terry Bloch, died in 1992. In this brief narrative, Jahred describes what it means to him to be gay and rural.

I’VE LIVED IN the Twin Cities, and I think so many gay men’s lives there are so superficial. They are so concerned about things that don’t really matter, like where they live and what they wear. I’m real content with where I live, and if I have a clean tee-shirt and jeans on, I’m fine—I don’t feel awkward at all, no matter where I go. I guess I’m more down to earth, very common, and when I go to parties where it’s all urban people I feel like I’m the country boy. Once I went to visit my friend Alan in San Francisco. He had invited people over, and then we were all going to go out to eat together. Alan was a little uncomfortable introducing me because I’m midwestern, from Minneapolis, just like Mary Tyler Moore; we don’t know anything! When all these hardcore city people started talking about where we were going to eat, they asked me if I liked sushi. I said I’d never had it. You’ve never had sushi? It was as if I’d said I had grown up in Antarctica. It didn’t bother me at all, but Alan was uncomfortable, like they were thinking I was just a hick. So I asked if any of them had ever had lutefisk, and not one of them had even heard of it.1

I decided as a kid that I was going to live on a farm when I grew up. I hated the mechanical stuff with a passion—vehicles, tractors, machinery—but I enjoyed taking care of the animals. I did all the livestock chores, and if an animal was sick, I gave the shots. With the heifers, ewes, and sows, I was good at delivering the young ones. When I was three or four years old I would deliver lambs by myself, and when the ewe would knock me down I’d get right back up to take care of the lambs and get them to suck. If a sow had pigs outside in the winter, we’d bring them into the house. Mom says that when she’d get up in the night, I’d be up taking care of them.

It takes a special kind of gay person to grow up in a rural area and want to stay there, and I’m more that kind of person than my partner Terry is. He could be a city person very easily. Terry needs to have people around
a lot more than I do, like most of my friends and acquaintances who live in the Cities. I enjoy having company, but I also enjoy being by myself. A lot of the people who stay in rural areas are like that, and it's real hard for gay people who grew up on the farm and want to live on the farm to find someone who also wants that. My friend John says that when he goes out with someone and brings them out to his farm, he can tell by how they act the minute they get out of the pickup if it's going to work or not. Most gay people from the city think living in the country is isolating, and they just can't handle it. It is a simpler life on the farm, but whether you're on the farm or in the city you have to come to terms with the fact that you've really only got yourself in life, and if you don't make yourself happy someone else isn't going to make you happy. Too many people clutch onto someone else, looking for security and acceptance.
I think I would have been a real good farmer because I really enjoy just going out and doing the chores. I thought about going into dairy farming when I bought this place. I could buy my hay and feed and just take care of the animals. What a good life that would have been. To me, farming is real relaxing and doesn’t even seem like work. But I’m kind of a workaholic, and I think that comes from growing up on a farm. It’s hard for Terry to get me to go anywhere on a vacation because I just don’t trust other people with the animals. They’re my responsibility, and if something happens I feel guilty. No one but Terry would put up with that. Someday I’d like to have a farm or ranch for young gay runaways and gays whose parents have kicked them out, an oasis where they can get away and not worry about straight people or being closeted. They could stay here and Terry and I could be surrogate parents until they’re able to get on their own feet. They need positive role models, and they need to see that relationships can last.

NOTE

1. A staple of Scandinavian cuisine, lutefisk is dried cod which is tenderized by soaking in lye, and then rinsed before cooking.