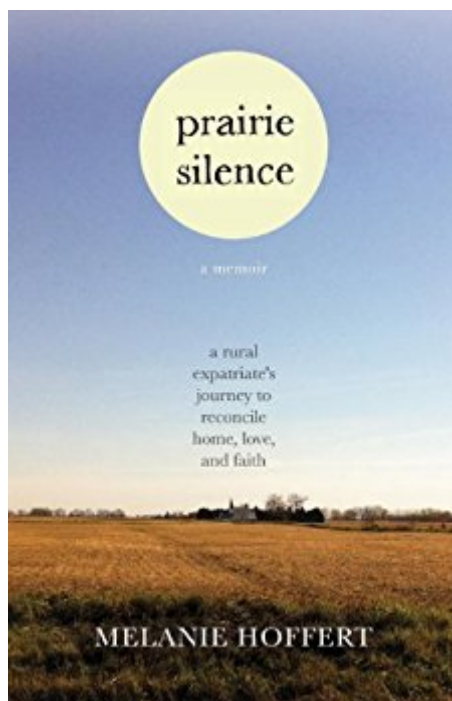


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# Prairie Silence: A Memoir



## Synopsis

A rural expatriate's struggle to reconcile family, home, love, and faith with the silence of the prairie land and its people—Melanie Hoffert longs for her North Dakota childhood home, with its grain trucks and empty main streets. A land where she imagines standing at the bottom of the ancient lake that preceded the prairie: crop rows become the patterned sand ripples of the lake floor; trees are the large alien plants reaching for the light; and the sky is the water's vast surface, reflecting the sun. Like most rural kids, she followed the out-migration pattern to a better life. The prairie is a hard place to stay—particularly if you are gay, and your home state is the last to know. For Hoffert, returning home has not been easy. When the farmers ask if she's found a "fella," rather than explain that "actually" she dates women, she stops breathing and changes the subject. Meanwhile, as time passes, her hometown continues to lose more buildings to decay, growing to resemble the mouth of an old woman missing teeth. This loss prompts Hoffert to take a break from the city and spend a harvest season at her family's farm. While home, working alongside her dad in the shop and listening to her mom warn, "Honey, you do not want to be a farmer," Hoffert meets the people of the prairie. Her stories about returning home and exploring abandoned towns are woven into a coming-of-age tale about falling in love, making peace with faith, and belonging to a place where neighbors are as close as blood but are often unable to share their deepest truths. In this evocative memoir, Hoffert offers a deeply personal and poignant meditation on land and community, taking readers on a journey of self-acceptance and reconciliation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The lead for this memoir is about a gay woman coming out to her home town, which terrifies her. First I need to say that I am not gay but in reading further into the description I saw that Melanie was a farm girl, as I am. She grew up in rural (way rural) North Dakota where the nature of people was their deep connection to the land and to each other as good neighbors, but not interfering with each others lives. Like the black hills or darkness there was a certain silence. Once she had left the farm, as droves of others for the city, she was often quizzed about her roots, "Really? North Dakota?" people would smirk or make another weird remark as much about the farm as ND. She felt the need to defend it (mine was rural Ohio and believe me the experience has been the same...made me laugh). In any case, this many year journey takes the reader on a weave of Melanie trying to align her home town values, religion (OMG who won't identify with the judgment there), her confusion and guilt about her sexuality (again, many laughs), and what people will make of her. The writing is tight, characters well drawn complete with their backgrounds (just enough), feelings and motives. In some sense the poignancy is how guarded the writer is in the beginning which aligns with the title. Don't know if it was intentional or not but it resonated with me. I enjoyed the read, shed a few tears, especially at the ending. Well done!

Prairie Silence made me laugh, cry, nod my head, long for my home, and left me with a feeling of sadness for Ms. Hoffert and everyone else who has to hide their true self from those they love and care about. Many of us hide a piece of ourselves from others. Ms. Hoffert's courage in writing this book is not lost on me, and I have great respect for her. By writing this book, she has exposed her complete self to her hometown, and they will either wrap their arms around her and let her know she is welcomed and loved as her true self, OR not...I grew up in that same small town. Ms. Hoffert captured it so well with her words, and I am pleased. I have lived in other parts of the country and world for 24 years, and I long for that same prairie every day. I was so happy to see that I'm not the only one who sees our piece of flat prairie as a place of beauty. It is very difficult to explain to others why it is so appealing. We don't have mountains, an ocean, or bustling city streets with a variety of entertainment from others. What we have is a beautiful peacefulness. People who are the salt of the

earth. A place we can always call home, and people who remember us no matter how long we've been gone. Ms. Hoffert's writing flows in a way that draws the reader into her world to experience her feelings as she shares the events of her life. I found it difficult to put the book down, and I finished it in two days...only because I had to go to work in the middle of it! I have gained a new understanding and empathy for those who struggle with their sexuality and try to reconcile it with their faith. I pray that Ms. Hoffert has opened people's minds, as she has mine. As others have written, anyone who reads this book will come away with a lesson learned and an understanding of something that you will be able to apply to your own life in some way.

Melanie Hoffert has created a thoughtful and gentle portrayal of a disappearing way of life. What shines through is her love and understanding of the rural North Dakota landscape and the people that inhabit it and make their living in its small towns and farms. As Melanie poignantly describes the struggles of realizing she was in some way different than others growing up in her small town, her honest memoir paves the way for all of us who have ever felt separate or different for any reason. This is a book that made me laugh and cry, but I felt like a better human being just for having read it. Bravo, Melanie Hoffert, for allowing the four-year old Melanie's revelation in a tree to bubble up through the ancient Lake Agassiz, beyond silence. Also, as a former public librarian, I would recommend this for all school and public library collections.

I got home after a wonderful evening listening to this beautiful author read her life story and knew I needed to get the book. What an amazing woman, and it honestly it is the BEST BOOK I have ever read. I can say I have never read a book as fast as *Prairie Silence: A Memoir*. Once, I opened the cover I could not set it down. I cried, giggled and cried some more. It was the most beautiful, heartfelt & honest book I have read. I hope that it will touch everyone the way it touched me. I hope it opens the eyes of those who do not understand the war, internally people go through to find who they truly are. I commend you for being an amazing woman. Thank you Melanie for putting your heart and soul out in the book, for being a model to those who do not have the words or ability to say what they wish they could. Ready for book number 2.

Wonderful writer with amazing descriptors. I have grown up in ND since I was 4. She is spot on in her description of ND life and what can happen with family secrets in small town ND. Even the largest town is a small town. I commend her for her ability to create her path in life, and her talent for describing it to the world. I will be watching for her writing in the future.

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