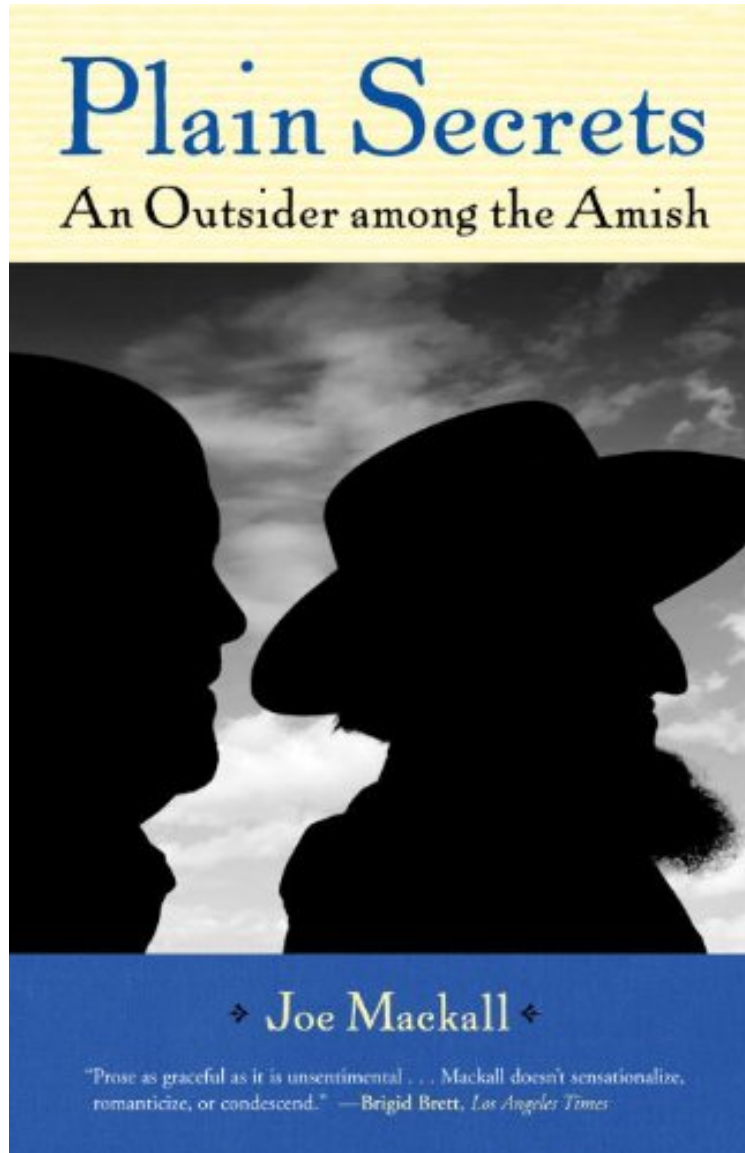


[E-BOOK] Plain Secrets: An Outsider among the Amish

Plain Secrets: An Outsider among the Amish

Joe Mackall

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Joe Mackall : Plain Secrets: An Outsider among the Amish before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Plain Secrets: An Outsider among the Amish:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Outsider Amongst the Amish By SJWHEA This was a very enjoyable read. Joe Mackall did an excellent job with the details of the experiences these people share everyday. Following the life of an Englisher into an Swartzentruber Amish family gave an insight that was otherwise unknown to the outside world. As an outsider you can see that the Amish are no different then we are when it comes to dealing

with the sorrows and happiness of the day to day events of family and community. The only difference is the way that they are taught to deal with them. We could all take heed to their way of life and their community ties that keep them alive and thriving. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not From Our World By S. Pome I became interested in the Amish after reading a novel and looking deeper into their way of life. I found it very interesting how they live their lives through their rules of their church. To be that dedicated is what I admire about them as a people. The author did a great job in putting himself into learning about his subjects. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Insightful! By Teresa I have read and traveled pretty extensively among the Amish, but even so, Mackall's book shared insights that I had not heard before. These insights were mainly about the differences between the different sects of the Amish. When all is said and done though, once again, I am reminded how we fellow human beings are more alike, than different! We all have to have a healthy regard for human life in general and we would be a much better people!

Joe Mackall has lived surrounded by the Swartzentruber Amish community of Ashland County, Ohio, for over sixteen years. They are the most traditional and insular of all the Amish sects: the Swartzentrubers live without gas, electricity, or indoor plumbing; without lights on their buggies or cushioned chairs in their homes; and without rumspringa, the recently popularized "running-around time" that some Amish sects allow their sixteen-year-olds. Over the years, Mackall has developed a steady relationship with the Shetler family (Samuel and Mary, their nine children, and their extended family). *Plain Secrets* tells the Shetlers' story over these years, using their lives to paint a portrait of Swartzentruber Amish life and mores. During this time, Samuel's nephew Jonas finally rejects the strictures of the Amish way of life for good, after two failed attempts to leave, and his bright young daughter reaches the end of school for Amish children: the eighth grade. But *Plain Secrets* is also the story of the unusual friendship between Samuel and Joe. Samuel is quietly bemused and, one suspects, secretly delighted at Joe's ignorance of crops and planting, carpentry and cattle. He knows Joe is planning to write a book about the family, and yet he allows him a glimpse of the tensions inside this intensely private community. These and other stories from the life of the family reveal the larger questions posed by the Amish way of life. If the continued existence of the Amish in the midst of modern society asks us to consider the appeal of traditional, highly restrictive, and gendered religious communities, it also asks how we romanticize or condemn these communities and why. Mackall's attempt to parse these questions to write as honestly as possible about what he has seen of Amish life tests his relationship with Samuel and reveals the limits of a friendship between "English" and Amish.

From Publishers Weekly In an engaging personal memoir, Mackall, an Ohio-based writer and professor of English, describes the close-knit relationship he has cultivated over more than a decade with a neighboring Amish family. This is neither an exposé nor an outsider's fanciful romanticization of the Amish. By focusing on the loves and losses of one large Amish clan, Mackall breathes life into a complex group often idealized or caricatured. He refers, for example, not to "the Amish" writ large, but instead to "the Swartzentruber Amish I know," describing in some detail the tremendous differences between the Swartzentrubers, by far the most traditional sect, and the Old Order, New Order, Beachy and other Amish groups. The Swartzentrubers not only eschew electricity but also padded or upholstered chairs, souped-up buggies, indoor plumbing, the tradition of rumspringa (a running-around period for some Amish teens) and perhaps most important for this narrative contact with "the English." Mackall's is the first book to venture behind-the-scenes of this most conservative Amish group. At times Mackall is critical of the Swartzentruber way of life (such as when an eight-year-old girl dies in a buggy accident because the sect rejects safety measures for buggies), but it is a deeply respectful account that never veers toward sensationalism. (June) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist *Starred* As this wonderful and enlightening book makes clear, the Amish are hardly a monolithic group. Actually, there are many different orders of Amish. The decidedly non-Amish Mackall has lived among the Swartzentruber Amish of Ashland County, Ohio, for more than 16 years. The Swartzentruber are considered the most conservative Amish, eschewing gas, electricity, and indoor plumbing. Even their ubiquitous buggies are driven without lights. Over the years, Mackall developed a friendship with the Shetler family, and *Plain Secrets* is an affectionate portrait of a family as well as a way of life. Some stereotype and romanticize the Amish, saying they represent an ideal, preindustrial American community. Others sensationalize them as backward religious fanatics. Mackall knows the Shetlers as persons, not cardboard figures, and he has readers get to know them as persons, too. His is hardly black-and-white portraiture. The Amish he writes about are as complex and flawed as any non-Amish. Although he admires their connection to the land and devotion to family, he is conflicted about the future of Amish girls, who live under a resolutely patriarchal household regime, in particular. This is a loving portrait, warts and all, of an often-misunderstood people. Sawyers, June Prose as graceful as it is unsentimental . . . Mackall doesn't sensationalize, romanticize, or condescend. Brigid Brett, Los Angeles Times "Mackall does the job beautifully, painting an intimate portrait of the family that leaves the reader feeling humbled by the common thread that's woven into all of us." Sarah English, Cleveland Magazine "Wonderful and enlightening . . . a loving portrait, warts and all, of an often misunderstood people." Booklist, starred review "An

engaging personal memoir . . . neither an expos nor an outsider's fanciful romanticization of the Amish. By focusing on the loves and losses of one large Amish clan, Mackall breathes life into a complex group often idealized or caricatured."Publishers Weekly"

In simple but elegant prose that matches the values of his subject, Joe Mackall takes us deep into the Amish community. He neither romanticizes nor condemns an alternate way of living, but provides stunning insight through the generosity and compassion of his own heart."Chris Offutt, author of *The Same River Twice* and *Kentucky Straight*"

Joe Mackall's *Plain Secrets: An Outsider Among the Amish* meets the biggest challenge of a book such as this by living up to his subtitle: Mackall is both outside and among in equal measure, and it's the most difficult terrain to occupy. *Plain Secrets* vibrates in that in-betweenness, in ways that only songs or poems usually can, and it does so in prose that's as clear as water. Its built the way the Amish build their barnseverything here is plumb and level." Diana Hume George, author of *The Lonely Other: A Woman Watching America*"

Joe Mackall's patience, empathy, and dogged curiosity illuminate this fine, fascinating study of an elusive culture. *Plain Secrets* is a provocative, humbling, and soulful book."Joshua Wolf Shenk, author of *Lincolns Melancholy*"

Plain Secrets is a moving exploration of a little-known world and friendship across a cultural divide."Boston Globe

Off the Shelf column"

Mackall explores this paradox with rare honesty and insight . . . Another strength of the book is that while maintaining a personal narrative voice, Mackall folds in a succinct and engaging history of the Anabaptist religious tradition and the polity of the Amish church. This added context greatly enhances the more personal stories."Boston Globe"

Mackall's writing is an honest and refreshing change from the customary saccharin scribbling about the Noble Amish Man. Despite, or perhaps because of, Mackall's refusal to perch the Amish on a pedestal, he manages to convey a deep respect for the people."Lancaster New Era"

Mackall describes the details of family, farming and church life with sympathy, accuracy and good will His particularistic description of one family is a welcome addition to what had often been a sociological literature." Christian Century". . . he writes with a forthright precision."Akron Beacon Journal"

The book points to a difficult truth: A religious community is bound to be freed. Mackall explores this paradox with rare honesty and insight . . . [and] achieves what he promises."Tom Montgomery-Fate, Boston Globe