



The Egg and I

Betty MacDonald

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When Betty MacDonald married a marine and moved to a small chicken farm on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, she was largely unprepared for the rigors of life in the wild. With no running water, no electricity, a house in need of constant repair, and days that ran from four in the morning to nine at night, the MacDonalds had barely a moment to put their feet up and relax. And then came the children. Yet through every trial and pitfall—through chaos and catastrophe—this indomitable family somehow, mercifully, never lost its sense of humor.

An immortal, hilarious and heartwarming classic about working a chicken farm in the Northwest, a part of which first appeared in a condensed serialization in the Atlantic monthly.

The Egg and I Details

Date : Published 1992 by George Mann Books (first published 1945)

ISBN : 9780704102477

Author : Betty MacDonald

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Humor, Nonfiction, Biography

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From Reader Review The Egg and I for online ebook

Margitte says

This is one of the most funniest and fascinating memoirs I have ever read. I want to add some quotes later on. This book is a must-read.

THEN LATER ON ...

We had a power cut yesterday and since my iPad was low on battery power as well, I did not want to spend it writing reviews. So I waited until today to add some memorable quotes from the book to my thoughts. There was so much in the book to relate to, living in the mountains myself and having to deal with similar adventures(yes, even many decades after this book was published), that I just had the laughs of my life reading this book.

Her outright honesty, just being herself, was really so refreshing!

Sooooo, some quotes: lots o'em!!!

(view spoiler)

I think this book will be one of my all time favorites. I've learnt early in my own expeditions into the wild that a healthy sense of humor was the only thing that will keep me sane and happy. Instead of being mad, frustrated, depressed, I wrote down my experiences for friends and family in long letters that had everyone hollering with laughter. They phoned me with tears of merriment in their voices. It was my way of healing and balancing out life. So in every sense of the word, I identified with Beth and knew what she was trying to

accomplish. I felt like her.

MAP says

This book was written in 1945 and follows Betty MacDonald's adventures in the 1920s living on a chicken farm with her new husband in Washington State. The book is based in reality, but characters have been melded, warped, squished together, and changed for humor's sake.

The book is, first and foremost, a humor book, and I will admit there were several laugh out loud moments, especially near the beginning. MacDonald certainly has a sly wit about her and since this was her first try at writing, I certainly want to seek out *The Plague and I*, which was written later and probably more well-polished.

Despite its humor, there are 3 reasons why this did not get 4 or 5 stars:

1. The random, insulting things said about Native Americans should be taken in their context, but they are still uncomfortable to read for a 21st century reader
2. Every once in a while, the grammar and wording was bizarre and completely nonsensical. I'm not sure if it was an editorial problem, or what, but every once in a while I would read a sentence over and over and over and just think "That's not English. What on earth is she trying to say?"
3. By the last 70 or so pages of this book, I was pretty ready for it to end. In my opinion, a good solid 4 or 5 star book should leave you sad to see the end, not relieved.

Overall, I would recommend this book, but I would say check it out from your library (it probably has it -- mine did) and then only buy it if you really love it and want it for your collection.

Bonnie says

Well, there are 2 groups of people I wouldn't recommend this book to: vegetarians/animal lovers, due to the realities written about of living on a farm, and especially a chicken farm, and people offended by racist Native American portrayals, due to the author's own racist opinions.

I can pretty much guarantee that if you don't fall into the first group, you most likely will fall into the second, so I'm not sure who to recommend it to. In fact, I myself threw down the book in disgust, and almost gave it up completely, when I read the last paragraph of the chapter titled "Bow and Arrow", in which she states that it's a good thing that we took this beautiful country away from "the braves", because Hiawatha they ain't. At this point, you might be wondering why I gave it 3 stars, and in fact would give it 3.5 if I could. Well, I'll get into that after I summarize the plot.

This is an autobiographical story written in 1945 by the author of the Miss Piggle Wiggle series. Betty marries a man named Bob, whose job has something to do with numbers and money. She's not sure exactly what. Soon after they marry, Bob begins dreaming of running a chicken farm. Betty's mother gave her the advice, when she was growing up, that whatever your husband wants to do, say yes, because if they are happy with their profession, you are happy. This worked well for Betty's mom, who was the adventurous sort, but it does not turn out so well for Betty, because Bob moves them to the mountains of Vashon Island (in Washington) to a farm with no running water, no electricity, and no neighbors within 4 miles, or town within 20. The book takes place during their first year on the farm, through trials and tribulations, learning

and growing, good times and bad, but always with a sense of humor, and a sense that despite Betty's grumbles, she will make it work.

Okay, so for the good. Like I mentioned, the book is written with a great deal of humor. This does not mean that Betty is thrilled with what her life is like now. In fact, her neighbors are shocked by her for 2 reasons: she reads, and she says no to her husband. At some points, I wished she would tell him no more often, since it seems like she is the only one taking care of the darn chickens, but she was pretty progressive for the time, in that aspect, I guess.

Another good part are the descriptions. She describes her actions, and especially her surroundings remarkably well. Part of it is that she personifies nature, which normally is not recommended, but she does it to perfection, hilariously so. She also describes her neighbors so well, that if you were to meet Maw and Paw Kettle somehow, you would feel like you knew them. She sometimes is...okay, quite often is biting in her descriptions of her neighbors, which is odd, because they are real people, but I guess she figures it's okay because they can't read. HmMMMMM...

I have to mention another bad thing, which is her complete lack of transitions. She begins a chapter by listing, for example, "all the good things about living this way were the food, the views, ...and so on, and would then go on to write about the food. All of a sudden, bam, a paragraph will begin, "The views..." and you're thrown for a second, until you realize, okay she's just going to jump from one item on the list to the next, transitionless. It took a while to get used to.

There you have it. The good and the bad. I'll leave it up to you to decide which outweighs which in your mind.

thefourthvine says

Betty MacDonald (author of the Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle series) tells the story of her early, disastrous marriage to a chicken farmer. She has a great narrative voice, a fabulous sense of humor, and a way with an anecdote.

Annnnnnd she's also racist as hell. Which pretty much ruins a lot of the book. So, FYI: interesting, funny memoir of a way of farming that is now totally gone, in a part of the country not many people write about. With a giant helping of open, unapologetic racism, of the Native-Americans-are-actually-subhuman variety. Read with caution.

Lee Anne says

The author of the Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle series also wrote several memoirs, this being the most famous. It's the book that introduced Ma and Pa Kettle to the world. Read through today's eyes, it's so horribly racist regarding Native Americans that I can't recommend it in my job, but it's a funny and warm book regardless. I guess that's like saying, "It's a great story, minus the Klan meetings"--it's not that bad, but I can't set the racism aside, and...I don't know. I can't imagine following my newly-wedded husband's dream of buying a chicken farm on a mountainside in Washington State. No plumbing, no electricity, bad stove (therefore little heat)--it's like a nightmare for me, for whom roughing it is a heated/air-conditioned/cable tv having cabin with a shower and no bathtub. I plan on digging up her other books, especially her recounting of the time she spent in a tuberculosis hospital. She's a talented, but flawed, writer.

Felisa Rosa says

A memoir of rural life that lit up the best-seller lists in 1945, *The Egg and I* is the story of a young bride in the late 1920s who gets dragged to the woods of Washington by her enthusiastic and unsympathetic husband. Like Shirley Jackson's *Life Among the Savages*, which I just read, MacDonald's memoir captures the life of an overwhelmed housewife with a keen mind, a sharp sense of humor, and an unusual and subversive vision of her time. These were women who were trying to be good wives and mothers, but who didn't always like the role they were pushed into, and said so, wittily. Both writers let the darkness creep in at the edges of otherwise breezy stories, which give the books a poignancy one might not expect from the 'harried housewife' genre.

MacDonald is a strong writer, who captures the sometimes creepy beauty of the Northwestern wilderness vividly. Her descriptions of the couple's hillbilly neighbors are funny, if a bit cruel at times. Particularly amusing are her horrified descriptions of the dull and unhealthy food (pork belly and boiled macaroni) her neighbors ate on a regular basis, despite their access to fabulous homegrown vegetables and wild foods. She was evidently far ahead of her time in regards to food: she writes descriptions of the bounty of their table that would make a modern foodie groan in hunger and jealousy. Wild mushrooms, fresh mussels, fresh oysters, fresh cream...Unfortunately, she was not ahead of her time in regard to her take on the local Native Americans: if anything, her descriptions, though intended to be humorous, are unusually mean-spirited. However, over time I have come to accept that works and ideas are best judged in the context of their time, and I'm pretty sure MacDonald would have had a different take (or at least had the good sense to keep her mouth shut) had she been writing today. Just as I have to grudgingly appreciate Jefferson for some of his ideas, if not all of them, I can't discount a sharp writer for espousing one view I don't agree with. Did I just compare Betty MacDonald to Thomas Jefferson? Yes I did.

Anyway...a highly entertaining read if you can ignore that fatal flaw.

Hannah says

I'm giving this (a very generous) 2 stars due to the excellent scenic descriptions of the Washington state environment. I got a real sense of the beauty and bounty of the area and that's one thing I always enjoy about a book.

Otherwise, MacDonald's brand of humor isn't one shared by me, and I found nothing remotely funny about her life on a chicken farm in the 1940's. There's a bitterness about her observations of "people-not-herself" that manifests itself as a mean-spirited bigotry that you often find in older books. I'm one of the last people to jump on the PC patrol wagon for a book written prior to the 1960's, but even I could hardly stomach some of MacDonald's catty remarks about people who (between the lines I read) were uneducated but overall warm-hearted and willing to try and be friends (and friendly) with the MacDonald's in the way that came easiest to them. And don't even get me started on her opinions of the Native Americans (let me just say that they made Ma Ingall's of *Little House* fame look like a charter member of the ACLU...)

Really having a hard time seeing this as an American classic in humor, but there it is. I'll leave it up to others to enjoy (or despise) this on their own.

Alison Hardtmann says

And then winter settled down and I realized that defeat, like morale, is a lot of little things.

Betty MacDonald remembers the first two years of her marriage, in which she and her husband create and run a chicken ranch located in the wilds of Washington state. Originally published in 1945, the writing style reminded me of Jean Webster (who wrote *Daddy-Long-Legs*), with its mix of charm and dry wit. MacDonald finds the humor in any situation and is as willing to poke fun at herself as she is at the people around her. She has to fight to adjust to rural living and to the hardships and constant work involved, but she's game.

There is one aspect that mars this outrageously delightful memoir; MacDonald mixes in a large helping of racism aimed at the local Native Americans, which culminates in her being glad that their land was being taken from them. Even her husband asks her to take it down a notch, and given that the flaws she sees in them are exactly the same flaws she sees in many of the men around her, it's surprising that she never notices that she only sees white people as individually flawed. I'd like to give her the benefit of simply being a product of her own time, but as her own husband asks her to take it down a notch, it seems she was bigoted even by the standards of her time.

I loved this book until I didn't. I can see why it's been allowed to sink into obscurity and at the same time I'm sorry about that -- it's such a vivid, insightfully rendered picture of a specific time and place.

Ivonne Rovira says

I adored Betty MacDonald's four Mrs. Piggie-Wiggle books when I was a child — so much so that I tracked them down to read to my own children when they came along. So I was ready to laugh uproariously with MacDonald's famous memoir *The Egg and I*.

And don't get me wrong: Parts of the book are hilarious: her paternal grandmother Gammy, the travails of the chicken ranch, and the plight of being the intellectual but plain younger sister. But modern-day readers will be taken aback by the antiquated expectations for wives and the acceptable level of racism toward Native Americans in the 1920s. It's easy to forget how widespread the beliefs were that wives should kowtow to their husbands' every whim — no matter how imprudent or disastrous — and that a proud people that whites had slaughtered and conquered were shifty and lazy.

So in a way, *The Egg and I* serves as a time capsule that reveals how far we've come. And it provides a glimmer of hope that, in 90 years, Americans will have evolved sufficiently that they will be dumbstruck that mass school shootings or gunning down a black young man in the back with impunity or poisoning the water supply of an entire city or sending Auschwitz-themed tweets to Jewish journalists or threatening to rape and murder female journalists could ever have been possible.

Mary Deborde says

I have to say, this is my favorite book of all time. First introduced to Betty's semi-fictionalized memoirs in the late 60s (via my mother's book collection), I've since made it a point to search out the vintage printings of all her works.

I tend to read this book once a year or so, usually during the winter months, because there is something familiar and cozy about *The Egg and I* - like a pair of well worn slippers. It's a trusted friend I turn to now & then, to bask in the whimsical adventures of a farm girl during simpler times.

While not without its poignant moments, the overall flavor is a gently muted humor well mixed in a pot bubbling over with unforgettable characters such as Ma & Pa Kettle, door to door salesmen, and unrecalcitrant chickens.

No bookshelf is complete without *The Egg and I*.

Jessica says

It took me a few pages to get into this book, but once I did I couldn't stop. It's semi-autobiographical and written in stream-of-consciousness, as Betty tells you the story of her childhood and how she ended up married to a man who dreamed of being a chicken farmer. (She thought she was marrying someone whose passion was insurance sales. She was wrong.)

Betty is hilarious and clever with an extremely dry wit as well as a keen curiosity. Everything about her adventures in chicken farming fascinates her, and then becomes yet another burden she must bear with tart humor. Four am wake up calls, bears, strange neighbors, bleak weather, the endless farm and housework, and the general horribleness of chickens are all narrated in her rapid-fire style. As she points out, and then is seconded by her brother-in-law (who quickly becomes her favorite family member), the problem with chickens is that you feed them and care for them and they don't even acknowledge you. Even cats show more affection! But Betty's husband, Bob, is completely enamored of every part of chicken ranching, from the early hours to the back-breaking labor to the drunken neighbors letting their cows loose on the countryside. So Betty is the straight-man in their marriage, and in the book, the only one seeing the strangeness and humor in it all.

I grew up as the hugest fan of the Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle books, which were also written by MacDonald, and as a teen I saw the movie, *The Egg & I* (which is a gem), but didn't realize until a couple of years ago that a) it was originally a book, and b) it was the Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle lady's story! What a delight to finally read this book, and find it to be just as fabulous as her children's books!

PS- My edition doesn't seem to be here on Goodreads. It's the 100th anniversary of Betty MacDonald's birth edition, with a photograph of an enormous egg on the cover. I really loved it, because it has a forward by her two daughters about the sudden, shocking fame their family encountered, and was very charmingly written, in the exact same style as the book.

Linda says

There are books that stay with you all your life. My mother read this to my sisters and brother and I when we were sick with the flu in England in the early 50's. I believe I have read this book about 30 times.

Betty Macdonald's early biography, she wasn't someone really famous, but she had a way with words. (the book is no where near as shallow and trivial as the movie of the same name with Claudette Colbert as a ridiculous woman dressed up at a county fair) Her description of how she ended up on a remote egg farm in Puget Sound, Washington area is priceless. Her childhood with a father who was a mining engineer and traveled a lot with a large family is definitely not the normal nostalgia. Her mother came from main line, and loved throwing it away to follow her husband to the remote ends of the US in turn of the 20th century. Her family was large and noisy, her paternal grandmother (Gammy)waged a constant battle with normality, all of it described in language that just makes you laugh out loud.

Her marriage to an insurance man with a yen to be a chicken farmer is just another set of experiences that just leave you gasping for air as you snigger along with her.

Ms. MacDonald's book is the genesis of Ma and Pa Kettle-- no where near as cartoonish as they came out in the movies, but even more layers to them and their lives. Of course most of the layers are covered in grime and chicken manure... but you should read about the real characters... I love this book

Catherine says

In the first few chapters, I thought a memoir by Betty McDonald's adventurous mother or eccentric grandmother might be more interesting. She did have some interesting observations & adventures during her brief time living on a chicken farms in very rural upstate Washington, but I never really got a sense of who Betty is. She does have a gift for writing personification -- the town, the mountain, etc.

The criticism I saw in other reviews -- the very negative tone of her writing, especially when it comes to "Indians," her country neighbors, the chickens, her husband -- is very true. She doesn't have many positive things to say, but I think that's her schtick. It's just not one that I really enjoy. Incidentally, she was sued by several of her former neighbors for her portrayal of them, even though she changed their names.

Reading this makes me more anxious to get my hands on a copy of Once Upon a Flock: Life with My Soulful Chickens.

Book Group selection for January 2014

Carol says

I haven't thoroughly enjoyed and laughed outloud with a really good book in a very long time. This book "The Egg and I" by Betty MacDonald has brought some fun and joy into my life. Betty MacDonald is Ma & Pa Kettles neighbor, and the story has to do with them moving to Washington State and they have a Chicken Ranch with many other animals and crops. She is so gifted in her way of telling her story. I don't want to be a spoiler, as this is a Book Club read, and we have some fun ladies that are a lot of fun and I don't want to ruin

it. After we have met, I will add some extra thoughts that are on my mind. It really is cute. Highly Recommend.

Sarah says

Thought this was hysterical. Autobiographical account of living on an egg farm in a hill-billy part of Washington. NOT PC. Humor a little down on self sometimes, like Charlie Brown. Funny and interesting snapshot of life in the 1920/1930's in the back woods.

Tig says

I should have adored this - I have loved all of Betty Macdonald's other books and I've been saving this one up as a treat. But it just didn't do it for me. There seemed much more mean-spiritness than in her other books. Of course her spikey, pointed observations are what make her writing so delightful, but barbed humour only works well when one delights in the shafts because they're aimed at a shared and justified target. And here I found myself completely out of harmony with her. There's the obvious atrocious racism - I'll pass over that because it's been said many times before that it's a serious flaw, possibly an unforgiveable flaw in the book (though I found interesting the idea that what she was really objecting to was the sexism). What I disliked as much as the racism, though, was the harping on about the filthiness and unappealing qualities of almost every local person she encountered. This woman has serious dirt issues, in that the whole subject terrifies her and that means we part company (I have an active dislike of obsessing over cleanliness and think a tidy house is often the sign of a bored mind). If someone has the courtesy to bring me a whole side of perfectly cooked smoked salmon, and cuts me a slice, the last thing I'm going to be writing about is how the sight of his hands revolted me: I will be enthusing about the qualities of sharing and community. BM can't stop mentioning everyone's filthy appearance, grubby, messy yards and unattractive children. She meets a woman on the shore who says it was such a nice day, she had to leave the housework and bring her children out to clam dig. Instead of being pleased to find a kindred spirit, BM immediately sets in to comment on the woman's dusty braids, holey trousers, filthy children who are all 'drooling idiots' (*really* offensive). I just found it so unpleasant - this is a farming community for heaven's sake: of course people have dirty clothes. I suppose in the end all I'm saying is her schtick isn't mine and I found the book sneery. I also get irritated by people who don't raise objections or negotiate with their partners when things seem unfair but then do that passive aggressive thing of letting everyone around know what a tough time they're having. I don't blame her for moaning about the farming - anyone would - but she makes sure we know every time her husband fails her in some way or forces her to do something she doesn't want. Either support him or ship out, I'd say (and I gather she shipped out, which seemed a very good idea to me). I wonder if part of the success of this book is that it taps into the American pioneer dream in a way that brings it closer for your average city type ie sassy, snappy city girl used to all mod cons takes on Ma Ingalls' role and gives us her sharp-eyed take on it? It clearly is a long-time favourite of many readers. Well, I'm not American, I don't obsess over hygiene and I live in a rural community where acceptance and warmth is an important part of getting along, and clearly none of those things helped. I wonder if I like the Plague and I so much because, being set in the sterile conditions of a hospital, it was not possible for BM to get bitchy over dirt? But I also think in that, and in Onions in the Stew she finds a happier balance of enjoying the eccentric types around her and finding common ground with some, while also mercilessly skewering pretension and meanness. Here, too many of her targets seemed deserving of a little more understanding. I did like the mountains, I must say, and the descriptions of the food (but oh, how she rubbed in it that SHE was a gourmet and everyone else ate

atrociously).

Steve says

As far as I'm concerned, this is the best book ever written. By anybody. And, go figure, it's *non-fiction*, a rarity for me anyway. MacDonald, as a bride in the 1920s, fell prey to her new husband's long-cherished dream of owning a chicken ranch, so off they went to the wilderness of Washington to raise chickens in a remote mountain location, where the nearest neighbors were a two-mile walk away. Frankly, living in the wilderness without electricity or indoor plumbing (she carried water from a spring not far from their property) would be about my idea of hell, even without the chickens, but the author manages to make it all hilarious, touching, and deeply evocative of the seasons, the environment, the neighbors and the era. It's a good, rich read that'll have just about anyone laughing out loud, and I couldn't begin to tell you how many times I've read it, or how many copies I've given away over the years.

Other reviewers have commented on MacDonald's "racist" views, but I don't think that's altogether fair. She didn't much care for most of the Native Americans that lived around her in Washington, and compared them unfavorably with the Blackfoot tribes she'd known in Montana, of whom she did think highly, so it can't truly be called 'racism.' One must also remember that this was written decades before anyone had even heard of "political correctness." At the time, Native Americans were invariably depicted in literature and film as bloodthirsty savages or as dimwitted sidekicks of (Caucasian) cowboys, so MacDonald's depictions of them as ordinary individuals, as subject to criticism and personal opinion as anyone else, was actually rather ahead of her time.

Christine says

Oh, this book.

I would give 90% of it 5 stars, but the other 10% gets negative stars. So whatever that evens out to is anyone's guess...The author is so talented and her prose so sprightly in parts and poetic in others that there can be no doubt as to the quality of the writing. Much if not most of it is fantastic.

My biggest problem with this book is the author's deeply ingrained snobbery and worse, racism. She's dismissive of all her neighbors, drawing blood with her pen as she eviscerates their housekeeping skills, personal appearance and lack of education. She's unbearable when discussing the Native American population of the rural Washington community she moves to, writing such hateful things that even when you take into account the times in which she grew up, there can be no mitigation of her small-mindedness, which is ironic, given her near-maniac attempts to sprinkle her prose with French phrases, literary name-checks and other nuggets of erudition.

Another irony: the one area of her life that falls outside the reach of her sharp pen is the power structure of her marriage. Her husband, often described as "devastatingly handsome" comes across a petty tyrant (not to mention borderline child molester, given that when they met and fell in love, she was 17 and he 30!).

Fantastic peek into the rural Pacific Northwest of the mid-early 1900's, check. Cringeworthy manifestation of the ugliest parts of the WASP psyche, check. One to read again and again? No. And I can see why this book seems to be out of print. Perhaps one of MacDonald's heirs would undertake excising the racism from the

book and re-publishing? Then, perhaps, I would make room for it on my permanent bookshelf. As it is, back to the library it goes.

Lynn says

I have read Betty MacDonald's *The Egg and I* at least three times. The first time I was about twelve, the second, maybe twenty-one and the last time in the virtual dotage of sixty-two.

My ten year old self took this as a fabulous adventure story and I wanted nothing more than to meet Gams and the hyperactive grandma and eat a geoduck clam with the MacDonalds.

At twenty-one, I laughed my head off. Being of an impractical nature myself, I got anxious and then giggling at what I took to be a hippies-in-the-woods story.

Last month, I nodded my head a lot as I read through my mother's copy that was passed on through a few inheritances. MacDonald looks to me now like an a woman who was sharp before her time-a person who whose sense of adventure and sense of humor allowed her to transcend the limited choices she was offered in the 1950's and turn the egg she was offered into a puffy, generous and thoroughly nutritious omelette.

-Lynn Hoffman, author of *The New Short Course in Wine* and a novel about another original woman: bang BANG

Christine says

Betty MacDonald is one of the funniest writers I have ever come across. Her stories about the American west during the early 20th Century and the stories (including many mishaps) of running a chicken farm in Port Townsend (which is a wonderful little town in my region) were so fun to read. She feels like someone you would love to meet in person.

She has a way with words that is like no one I have ever come across, it was wry and endlessly witty.

Beware, she has some very insensitive things to say about Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest. This book was published in the 1940's so I decided to take it with a grain of salt. I think her intention was to be witty but it comes off pretty badly. Clearly she had some bad experiences and probably would have related them differently if it had been published today.

