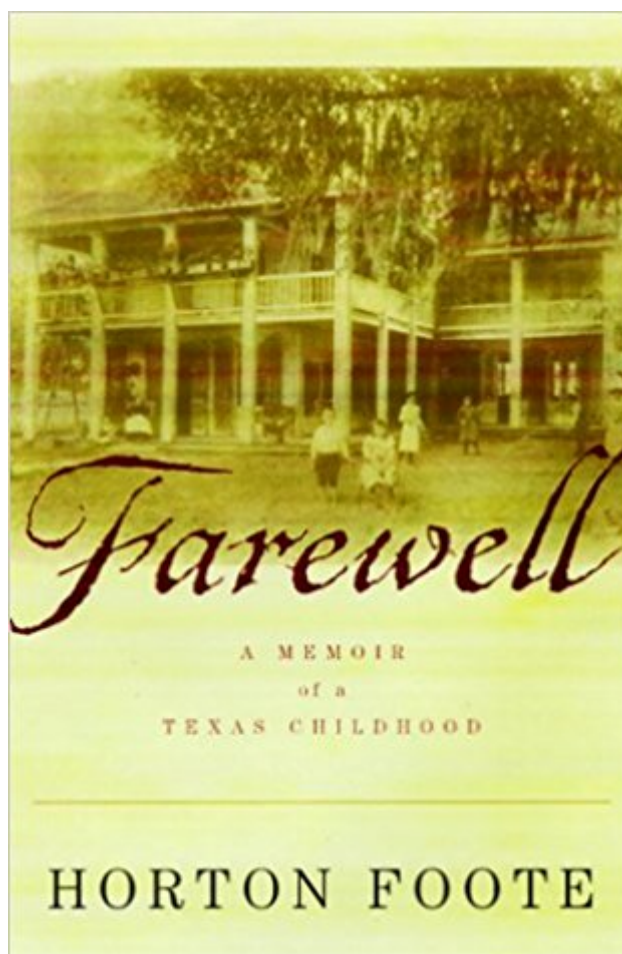


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# Farewell: A Memoir Of A Texas Childhood



## Synopsis

For more than five decades, Horton Foote, "the Chekhov of the small town," has chronicled with compassion and acuity the changes in American life -- both intimate and universal. His adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and his original screenplay *Tender Mercies* earned him Academy Awards. He received an Indie Award for Best Writer for *The Trip to Bountiful* and a Pulitzer Prize for *The Young Man from Atlanta*. In his plays and films, Foote has returned over and over again to Wharton, Texas, where he was born and where he lives, once again, in the house in which he grew up. Now for the first time, in *Farewell*, Foote turns to prose to tell his own story and the stories of the real people who have inspired his characters. He was the first child of his generation of Footes, born into an extended family of aunts, great-aunts, grandparents and dozens of cousins once removed, all of whom discovered that even as a young boy Foote was an avid listener with an uncanny ability to extract a story -- including those deemed unfit for children. Foote's memories are of a time when going down to meet the train was an event whether or not you knew someone on it, when black and white children played together until segregation forced them apart at school-age. Foote beautifully maintains the child's-eye view, so that we gradually discover, as did he, that something was wrong with his Brooks uncles, that none of them proved able to keep a job or stay married or quit drinking. We see his growing understanding of all sorts of trouble -- poverty, racism, injustice, marital strife, depression and fear. His memoir is both a celebration of the immense importance of community in our earlier history and evidence that even a strong community cannot save a lost soul. In all of Foote's writing, he reveals the immense drama behind quiet lives, or as Frank Rich has said, "the unbearable turbulence beneath a tranquil surface." *Farewell* is as deeply moving as the best of Foote's writing for film and theater, and a gorgeous testimony to his own faith in the human spirit.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The marvelous second chapter of *Farewell* sets the mood for everything to come in the noted playwright's memoir of his childhood in tiny Wharton, Texas. As a young Horton Foote questions his parents about their "elopement"--they had to go five blocks across town to be wed by a Baptist minister because his mother's Methodist parents didn't approve of the match--the intricate web of kinship, friendship, and local geography that shapes small-town life is hilariously yet touchingly revealed in each of their asides and elaborations. Foote's birth in 1916 healed the family rift, and he grew up in a cozy environment where everyone knew everyone else and more or less accepted their eccentricities. He doesn't gloss over the harsh realities of racial prejudice and segregation, but his tone is nonetheless elegiac, glowing with the magic of the characters' storytelling. Southerners have always been famous for their ability to spin yarns, and Foote captures that in extended passages of conversation. Direct quotes are generally cause for suspicion in a memoir, but when the dialogue has the same vigor and subtlety found in the author's screenplays and plays (*A Trip to Bountiful* and *The Young Man from Atlanta* among them), you're willing to give Foote the benefit of the doubt. --Wendy Smith

Though he later earned the moniker "Chekhov of the small town" for his portrayals of ordinary lives, Foote never heard of the Russian master until he went to California at 17 to study acting. In fact, despite a bookish childhood (the precocious Foote joined the Literary Guild and the Book of the Month Club at age 12), the playwright and screenwriter who won Oscars for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Tender Mercies* set out to act rather than write. His eventual change of path is beyond the territory of this genteel, unreflective childhood memoir, but clearly Foote's upbringing in small-town Wharton, Tex., in the 1920s had much to do with it. A backwater short on economic opportunities but disproportionately rich in colorful characters and tragic stories, Wharton and Foote's extended family of storytellers, gossips and ne'er-do-well uncles provided abundant inspiration. While Wharton exhibited reflexive racism and dust-bowl poverty, Foote's family was progressive and prosperous. Former slaveholders, they rejected the most virulent Southern traditions for kindly paternalism: Foote tells of finding KKK robes stashed in a cupboard and learning that his

grandfather attended one meeting out of a sense of very localized civic duty before resigning in disgust. Foote rarely moralizes or comments on how this, or anything for that matter, shaped him, instead relying on the dramatist's tool of dialogue to capture the textures of daily life. The book is so unreflective that it reads more like family history than memoir, frequently bogging down in perfunctory, dutiful tracings of every tangled limb of the ancestral tree. By far the most vivid character is Wharton, where every house and vacant lot, every storefront and street corner has a complex history. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Horton Foote wanted to be an actor, but one day, decided he'd rather be a writer. He's written many screenplays and adapted books to movies, the most popular probably being *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I'm not a movie fan, so haven't seen any of the movies he is associated with. Anyway, in this book, he concentrates solely on his family, the town he grows up in, and which most of his relatives live: Wharton, Texas. Thank goodness he was such an inquisitive fellow, as he pretty much gives you the lowdown on everyone who ever walked the streets of this small southern town. From rich plantation and land owners, to the poorest people in town, to the town eccentrics. (Doesn't every town have at least one?), to his 3 uncles who all came from good background, but none amounted to a hill of beans. I love some of the names the people had: Patience Louisa Texas, Reenie, Lida, Lily Dale and Miss Minnie Mae, just to name a few. He tells of good times and bad: the bad flooding the town had when the river overflowed, the tragedies of young people dying of disease or accidents, but then he also tells of the joys of small town life, sitting on the porch watching the fireflies, talking (and people did a LOT of that in the book), dances, family dinners, and a sense of community that so many of us no longer have. If you like reading about Southern people and small town life, give this one a try, it's really a good old fashioned storyteller's book.

Readers will appreciate Horton Foote's very easy writing style. This book talks about how he grew up in Wharton, Texas until he left home to go to acting school in California during the Great Depression. He talks about his family and the circle of relatives that he saw in Wharton and Houston during the 1920s and 1930s. Sometimes it can be difficult to keep track of the cousins because there were so many. One main theme of the book is why his mother's three brothers from a well-to-do family ended up being failures in life. Meanwhile, his father earned an honest living by running a small business while helping some people out. The book is not sugar-coated because there was a remarkable amount of dysfunction in the town - drunks, deadbeats, murderers, adulterers, cheats, racists - as well as decent folks. I believe that this book gives the reader a good

feel for life in small-town Texas during that era.

As someone who grew up in a small town in Texas, I can identify with so much of this book. My late Mother's childhood and her stories of growing up in a rural area with colorful characters are very similar to Mr. Foote's story. If you didn't grow up in this era or in a small town, these stories may not have the charm I feel about them, but Horton Foote could bring a tear to a glass eye with his charming memories, and I will bet that he can tug at your heartstrings as well. There is a place for sentiment and burnished memories in this busy life of ours, and I found myself wanting more after reading this memoir. As I read this book, I found myself envisioning the whole story in a pleasant sepia toned, soft cocoon of a state of mind. You come too.

Before you purchase the book, understand and take the title literally. Mr. Foote only talks about his life growing up in Texas until his 18th birthday. Many of the stories are uneventful, but there is a genuine and sincere tone throughout his storytelling. It is also an interesting precursor to the GREAT stories and plays he would write in later years. Definitely worth reading if you're a fan of HF!

While the ending was abrupt, it was exactly proper. This is a book for Texans to read and enjoy. Small town life well preserved in memory.

Love Horton Foote and enjoyed this book. However, I did not get any pictures when book was downloaded. Big disappointment since I would have liked to see see him and his wonderful family.

Enjoyed this very much

As a native to the state of Texas this memoir was near and dear. My childhood memories of another small Texas town were reunited with this almost 70 year old as I read the pages.

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