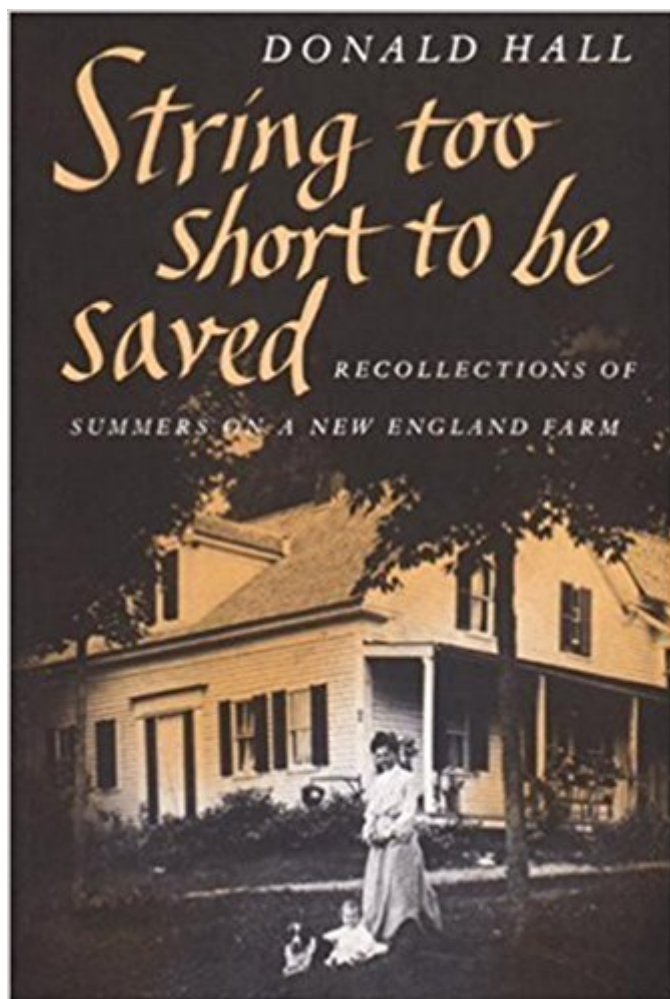


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String Too Short To Be Saved (Nonpareil Books, No. 5)



Synopsis

This is a collection of stories diverse in subject, but sutured together by the limitless affection the author holds for the land and the people of New England. Donald Hall tells about life on a small farm where, as a boy, he spent summers with his grandparents. Gradually the boy grows to be a young man, sees his grandparents aging, the farm become marginal, and finally, the cows sold and the barn abandoned. But these are more than nostalgic memories, for in the measured and tender prose of each episode are signs of the end of things a childhood, perhaps a culture. In an Epilogue written for this edition, Donald Hall describes his return to the farm twenty-five years later, to live the rest of his life in the house of string. We take pleasure in bringing back into print this classic account of boyhood summers in old New England, with the addition of an Epilogue and an album of family snapshots.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author reflects on his childhood days in New England, where he spent summers on his grandparents' farm. Copyright 1995 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

String Too Short to be Saved memorializes a time that is no more, but can live on forever in the warmth of the heart. --Joyce Bupp, Advisor
The best essays, for my money, to have been written about New England --The New York Times
The best essays, for my money, to have been written about New England --The New York Times

Donald Hall first published this collection of short stories, set in the rural area of central New Hampshire, in 1960. Most of the stories reflect his summer-time experiences with his grandparents, on their farm, during the '40's. There is a Marcel Proust "Remembrance of Things Past," quality to Hall's reminisces of his youth, and the joys he experienced with his grandparents, just as Proust did, in a rural corner of his native France. A portion of that joy was the heritage that his grandparent's conveyed to him, going all the way back to his great-great grandfather who had participated in the Battle at Vicksburg. And the wonderful title, one that beautifully conveys the frugality of farmers who performed their life's work in a less than optimum environment for raising crops or livestock. It was derived from the label on a small box Hall found in the attic, after his grandparents were deceased, filled, as you might now guess, with small pieces of string. But Hall is not uncritically nostalgic for a paradise lost. One of his more biting reflections is conveyed in the story "A Hundred Thousand Straightened Nails." The story concerns Washington Woodward, the character who would retrieve nails from timber, and attempt to straighten them, so that they could be reused. At the beginning of the story Hall describes such people as: "So many of them lived a half-life, a life of casual waste." Hall's conclusion at the end of the story: "He has saved nails, but wasted life." "... and his straightened nails had rusted into the dirt of Ragged Mountain." But the preponderant aspect of his stories is nostalgic warmth, and for me, and possibly for the potential reader, the stories that may forever linger are the ones concerning a summer haying, or the picking of blueberries high on Ragged Mountain, with the attendant concerns about his grandfather's health; for his grandfather was "pushing" it to the limit. In "Luther, Nannie, and the Callers," Hall recalls the era before TV, when "The late light of the evenings of early summer invited people to ride in their automobiles, and they gave themselves reasons by paying visits." And, "He was older than my grandfather, and I remember him snatching flies out of the air with his fast hands when he was more than eighty." Overall, Hall recounts the past that is not dead, and he says: "To be without a history is like being forgotten. My grandfather did not know the maiden names of either of his grandmothers. I thought that to be forgotten must be the worst fate of all," which was a passage that moved another reviewer. As he said in "Old Home,": "... but for many years I had daydreamed of a self-sufficient life in the country." Fortuitously, his daydreams never took the nightmare form that eventually consumed Hester in the same story. The curious aspect of these stories is that his parents are almost completely missing, both in relationship to their parents, as well as to the author. In the epilogue, Hall says that: "...I made that familiar confusion of personal loss with social decay; in the death of one man I saw the death of his people and his landscape." Yet life came full circle, and he

decided that this particular piece of rural landscape in central New Hampshire, with its views of Mount Kearsarge, would be his final resting place. Departures, yet continuity. A solid, 5-star read of life, as it once was, in rural New England.

I loved every bit of this book; the descriptive writing of Donald Hall took me to another world and my only complaint is that it was too short. This book is memories of Donald growing up and spending weekends on his grandfather's farm and his experiences haying, blueberry picking and the people he spent time with. From my own farm experiences, I feel his descriptions are very true, especially haying. I read this book after *Life Work* which is auto-biographical, and they were terrific to read one right after the other. Next I just received *Eagle Pond*. If anyone has any recommendations of books like *String Too Short To Be Saved*, please let me know. Happy reading.

Donald Hall is a writer beautifully tangent to and cognizant of the New England spine we all wish to immortalize in our thoughts of the 'old American spirit', a spirit too seemingly on the wane at present -even on 4th of July celebrations this year. His most recent collection of short stories, *WILLOW TEMPLE*, was my introduction to this Whitmanesque, Robert Frost-like wonder boy of observation. In returning to his early work in the Nonpariel Books reissue of *STRING TOO SHORT TO BE SAVED* one wonders why he has remained in the background, and hasn't found the wide audience he deserves. "STRING..." is a series of short stories of Hall's recollections of spending his summers with his beloved grandparents in New Hampshire. All phases of farming and maturing from a small child to a young adult are addressed in a wholly readable, poetic, illuminating fashion. Hall knows how to describe nature as well as anyone writing today. He also revives an appreciation for his roots that we could all study as journeys toward finding ourselves. "To be without history is to be forgotten" he writes. "My grandfather did not know the maiden names of either of his grandmothers. I thought that to be forgotten must be the worst fate of all." Hall invites us to accompany him on his memories of haying, picking blueberries, visiting the odd group of people who have become indelible American daguerreotypes for him. "The farm was a form: not a set of rules on the wall, but like the symmetry of winter and summer, or like the balance of day and night over the year, June against December. My grandfather lived by the form all his life, and my summers on the farm were my glimpse of it." Simple gifts, these. And the simplicity of Donald Hall's writing is what makes it so readable and so memorable. The book stands solidly on its own as a definitive New England memoir. In this new reissue there is an added Epilog which traces Hall's return to his New Hampshire memories and farm after many life changes. This Epilogue is worth the price of the book. If only this

edition weren't tainted by the crudely inappropriate pen and ink pictures imposed on the pages of each new chapter. But that is the only unnecessary clutter in this otherwise tender book.

I first read this book after finding it tucked in a book shelf at a friends house. One of those wonderful tales of rural, early depression era America, and the family connections and experiences that are brought back to memory by finding a box in the attic labeled "String too short to be Saved"...I loved this book-it is dear, wholesome and complete in its simplicity.

Since I once lived down the street from this historical house and occupant, it has a lot of meaning to me. Someone with no New England heritage might not have the patience to read it.

Nice & quick nostalgic read. I imagine it's an amazing read if you already have an interest in early 1900s New England farm life (specifically New Hampshire).

This fine book is about to entertain a 91-yr-old friend, a forester and farmer for many years. I wonder if he knows what "fixing the drag" is, but my guess is, yes. He will go nuts over the haying chapter and the blueberrying one.

Very good book! Thanks!

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