



# Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer

Written by Novella Carpenter

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# Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer

By Novella Carpenter

## Farm City The Education Of An Urban Farmer

Novella Carpenter loves cities—the culture, the crowds, the energy. At the same time, she can't shake the fact that she is the daughter of two back-to-the-land hippies who taught her to love nature and eat vegetables. Ambivalent about repeating her parents' disastrous mistakes, yet drawn to the idea of backyard self-sufficiency, Carpenter decided that it might be possible to have it both ways: a homegrown vegetable plot as well as museums, bars, concerts, and a twenty-four-hour convenience mart mere minutes away. Especially when she moved to a ramshackle house in inner city Oakland and discovered a weed-choked, garbage-strewn abandoned lot next door. She closed her eyes and pictured heirloom tomatoes, a beehive, and a chicken coop.

## Farm The City

What started out as a few egg-laying chickens led to turkeys, geese, and ducks. Soon, some rabbits joined the fun, then two three-hundred-pound pigs. And no, these charming and eccentric animals weren't pets; she was a farmer, not a zookeeper. Novella was raising these animals for dinner. Novella Carpenter's corner of downtown Oakland is populated by unforgettable characters. Lana (anal spelled backward, she reminds us) runs a speakeasy across the street and refuses to hurt even a fly, let alone condone raising turkeys for Thanksgiving. Bobby, the homeless man who collects cars and car parts just outside the farm, is an invaluable neighborhood concierge. The turkeys, Harold and Maude, tend to escape on a daily basis to cavort with the prostitutes hanging around just off the highway nearby. Every day on this strange and beautiful farm, urban meets rural in the most surprising ways.

## Farm City In Pretoria

For anyone who has ever grown herbs on their windowsill, tomatoes on their fire escape, or obsessed over the offerings at the local farmers' market, Carpenter's story will capture your heart. And if you've ever considered leaving it all behind to become a farmer outside the city limits, or looked at the abandoned lot next door with a gleam in your eye, consider this both a cautionary tale and a full-throated call to action. Farm City is an unforgettably charming memoir, full of hilarious moments, fascinating farmers' tips, and a great deal of heart. It is also a moving meditation on urban life versus the natural world and what we have given up to live the way we do.

(jacket)

## Farm City In Apopka

I end up on the "it was OK" rating of two stars mostly because Novella simply rubs me the wrong way. She unfortunately comes off to me as someone with just a bit of a holier-than-thou attitude toward her neighbors and neighborhood, although it's difficult for me to pinpoint just how that attitude gets communicated to me. Many times the scenarios are humorous and the interactions zany in a good way. Yet when she confesses that it took her two years to get up the courage to walk off her dead end street's block, I have to wonder why the hell she bothered living there? If she's been that afraid of the neighborhood for that long, what was the point? It was all they could afford? Or, as another reviewer suggested, it was all part of the book idea she wanted to pitch?

Her endeavors are refreshing, although I believe a lot more needs to be said about how to really begin doing something about the problem of our food sources. It's not realistic to believe we can all raise all our own food. I participated in a large garden with my family, and it came nowhere near feeding us, although it contributed many delicious additions to our meals. I don't see giving up flour because I can't personally grow the acres of wheat to create it as a helpful thought. Our human society is based on exchange, and has been for thousands of years. No doubt there have always been specialists in the human communities, and the products they produce can be traded for products others produce. Because we now live in a society that uses currency as an exchange tool doesn't change that reality. On the other hand, I do believe we need to begin to eat more locally, that more diverse farm production is healthier, and that it's good for people to know more about where their food comes from. There are a lot of good thought provoking starting points, but I think she fails to follow them through and her personality just doesn't appeal much to me. I'd rather read Michael Pollan or Barbara Kingsolver. ...more

I like reading gardening memoirs, even though I do not have a vegetable garden. As a farmer's granddaughter, I appreciate all of the hard work it takes to grow and raise food.

"Farm City" is an entertaining book about an urban farmer in Oakland, California, and she describes her neighborhood as being in the ghetto. At various times, Novella has kept chickens, rabbits, turkeys, ducks, geese, bees and even pigs in her backyard.\* (I visited her blog, Ghost Town Farm, and saw she also had a goat.) She I like reading gardening memoirs, even though I do not have a vegetable garden. As a farmer's granddaughter, I appreciate all of the hard work it takes to grow and raise food.

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ducks, geese, bees and even pigs in her backyard.\* (I visited her blog, Ghost Town Farm, and saw she also had a goat.) She planted a vegetable garden and some fruit trees, and even took over an abandoned lot next door, which she uses as a community garden.

I enjoyed most of Novella's stories, but there were a lot of digressions that I had to skim. This book should have been better edited -- not every rambling blog post needs to be printed in a book.

Some gardening memoirs that I thought were better written were "The \$64 Tomato" by William Alexander and "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle" by Barbara Kingsolver. But "Farm City" was a nice, pleasant read at the start of summer.

\*Small rant here, because I HAVE OPINIONS: I thought Novella and her boyfriend were nuts for trying to raise pigs in the city. If you want to raise that kind of livestock, move to the country. There are zoning laws for reasons. Several neighbors of theirs complained about the smell the pigs made, and I don't blame them. If my neighbor started keeping pigs in her backyard, I would raise hell. Look, I love and appreciate urban gardens, but there are limits, you guys. ...more

## Farm City In Lekki

I had fair warning: the sections of this book are named turkey, rabbit, and pig.

Still, I was willing to read about the killing and eating of animals because of the good things I'd heard.

The book is as much about living in the down-and-out part of Oakland and general D.I.Y. as much as urban farming. Carpenter's sense of humor is on target for the first half of the book, as is the charm in her descriptions of her neighbors, her farming projects, and even of the animals she keeps. She begins with vegetables and fruit and bees, then moves to birds, rabbits, and pigs. There is much to like in this book, but the last third of the book (pig) went to that place that I resent, where a person's hunger is more important than anything else and they forgive themselves violence as long as they "respect" the animal they kill. The last third of the book was hard to read not just because of the detailed descriptions of butchery and gourmet meat preps, but because the drooling obsession with fatty meat drowns any other concerns in the book. Unless you live solely for salami, the book becomes a bore.

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I still enjoyed approximately 2/3 of the book, but had to comment on the fact that Carpenter is weirdly uninformed and reactionary about people who concern themselves with animal rights. I chose to sit through her gore to see what else she had to offer, but it was clear she had nothing but disdain for anyone who would ever pass over pork. While she went on and on about the flavor of her pigs, I left a reasonably enjoyable book with a sour taste in my mouth. ...more

This was a painful read. The major problem of the book was summed up in the conclusion which is comprised of Carpenter's standard combination of hackneyed rhetoric, painfully ignorant social commentary, narcissism, and total inconsistency: In one breath she tells us that she has not changed the land, it has changed her, and in the next she tells us that perhaps she has altered the future of Oakland (so actually she thinks she has changed the land). She tells us that she has finally found her identity (a farmer) and in the next breath tells us that she was recently shocked to discover that roosters crow early in the morning. She tells us that she has a deep respect for animals and her relationship with

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them, but makes absolutely ZERO effort to understand them and when the rooster crowing becomes annoying she is all too happy to have the animal killed- not as a sacred offering as she describes the process earlier, but because the crowing is a pain in the ass. She loves living in the ghetto, but hopes the ghetto changes to her conception of what poverty could be. She is self-deprecating as far as calling herself (as well as everyone who has ever been useful to her) a "freak" and an "asshole", but is incapable of showing this humility when it comes to seeing what a total lack of care she has when it comes to the animals. In her dealings with animals the attitude seems to be " Well, just because I have no experience and have no understanding of X animal, doesn't mean I shouldn't buy some; If it doesn't work out they'll either die off due to my ineptitude or they'll live long enough for me to kill them."

This woman is insufferably pretentious, made worse by her total lack of awareness or sense of humor. Most of the beginning of the book is devoted to her describing how she has had every cool idea that ever occurred -- but no one appreciates how incredibly cool she is because the rest of us are so lame and stupid-- unless you're a vegetarian and then you're an annoying sentimentalist-- or also if you're from California, you're a fake freak that has come here to "reinvent" yourself-- unlike the author who has always been impossibly cool and ahead of the crowd. Or you work at the post office, or buy your food at the grocery store, or you do farm but don't have bees, or you are a republican, or you live in a good neighborhood, or you live on a rural farm, or you're an anarchist, or you're straight edge...

Who is a jerk?

- people who work at the post office
- urban farmers that don't eat their animals
- rural farmers
- everyone else who lives in California
- people who ask her questions
- vegetarians
- people who shop using catalogues
- homesteaders
- anarchists
- people who name their animals
- the poor

What else sucks?

- clean streets
- Cold weather
- nice things
- house rules when living with roommates

artisan butchers that don't do things the way she imagined them in fantasy This is made even worse by the totally artless prose, peppered with expletives and horribly boring details that do nothing for the narrative e.g.

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-- a page devoted to how she doesn't generally shop from catalogues and has low grade aggression against people who do, but would make exceptions when it came to farm equipment.

-- a story about how she borrowed a friend's truck and decided not to tell him that she had overloaded the truck bed and possibly damaged the suspension. End of story.

--Apparently "no one in the city" of Oakland knows how to tell if a watermelon is ripe so she had to drive to Mendocino. Really? While this is absurd, it also speaks to the fact that she never made a single friend in years of living there- or even on a speaking basis with any farmer/basically competent person in vegetables.

On killing slugs:

"I felt great. I killed so others might live. Death is all around us, even in an innocent watermelon. You just have to know where to look. "

I am not sure what "others" she imagines we're fighting for survival on her watermelon (nutritionally vacuous) but the histrionic prose is abundant.

...more

## Farm City In Devon

So, I read this book for the second time to try to give it another chance. I just WANTED to like it so much. The premise is something that is near and dear to my heart as I want to move from a heavy gardener to someone who is very deeply rooted in the farming scene. I grew up in a farming community and now live in the city, so shouldn't this book be right up my alley? The second try has confirmed, I hate this book. Maybe hate is a strong word, but who the hell told Novella to end her chapters with those cheesy one liners? So, I read this book for the second time to try to give it another chance. I just WANTED to like it so much. The premise is something that is near and dear to my heart as I want to move from a heavy gardener to someone who is very deeply rooted in the farming scene. I grew up in a farming community and now live in the city, so shouldn't this book be right up my alley? The second try has confirmed, I hate this book. Maybe hate is a strong word, but who the hell told Novella to end her chapters with those cheesy one liners? Who advised her to consistently try to define herself throughout the book by putting others down? I wanted to feel she is a genuine and funny person, but I literally said "UGHHHHH!!!!" out loud on the subway during various parts. The first time I suffered through this book, I read it aloud with my boyfriend and would sometimes pause and say, "no really, I cannot read this next line I just can't." On that basis alone I thought it would be entertaining to give it another try, especially after seeing so many high recommendations from people that I respect.

Do yourself a favor and read *Animal, Vegetable Miracle* instead. There was not one part of *Farm City* that got me as stoked and motivated to grow, harvest and share my food as much as *AVM*, which honestly changed the entire scope of the way I eat and look at food production. Plus I finished that book LIKING the author. ...more

(Audioversion) (Two and a half stars.) The story apparently sprang from her blog about how she moved to inner-city Oakland California and began growing her own food—moving quickly from fruits and vegetables, to bees, to meat-birds and rabbits, and finally to raising pigs—by squatting on a vacant inner-city lot, next to an apartment she rents. I had some mixed feelings about this one. The book is engaging, and there is a part of Carpenter that seems to have honorable intentions and a good heart.

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seriously lowered my opinion of Carpenter. In my eyes she went from a well-intentioned new breed of loving earth mother (she rather affectionately calls herself "a freak"), to a sanctimonious, self-absorbed little twerp. (And that's a heck of a lot nicer than what she called Sheila...) ...more

## Farm City In Malaysia

\*SPOILER ALERTS THROUGHOUT.\*

I should throw it out there that I was so totally psyched to read this book. I've had it on my to-read list since I read a review of it in the Times or the Globe (can't remember which) two years ago. I have lived most of my adult life in a manner that keeps me from growing as much food as I would like, and the premise of this book compelled me. It's the story of the author's move to inner-city Oakland in order to farm a vacant lot next door to her apartment, and all the wacky stories that happen along the way. \*SPOILER ALERTS THROUGHOUT.\*

I should throw it out there that I was so totally psyched to read this book. I've had it on my to-read list since I read a review of it in the Times or the Globe (can't remember which) two years ago. I have lived most of my adult life in a manner that keeps me from growing as much food as I would like, and the premise of this book compelled me. It's the story of the author's move to inner-city Oakland in order to farm a vacant lot next door to her apartment, and all the wacky stories that happen along the way.

I started out really liking the book, and gradually found myself disliking it more and more. The book is divided into three sections: "Turkey," "Rabbit," and "Pig"; as one might expect, each chapter is about her farming of that specific animal. As you can imagine, the animals range from least to most outlandish agricultural choices for city life.

I really started to dislike the author when she bought two turkeys. As a breed, turkeys thrive in flocks; they do not enjoy solitary life. I found myself even more frowny-faced when her female turkey died and she didn't get another hen to replace it. The tom was clearly miserable for the rest of his life, and probably never had it so great to begin with. I found it to be pretty hypocritical of the author to be all about giving her animals the best lives possible before killing and eating them when she didn't even bother to ensure that her turkeys would have such lives. Did I mention that the female turkey died because it flew over her relatively low razor-wire fence and was immediately ripped to shreds by a bunch of junkyard dogs that lived on the other side, and that the author knew about both the fence and the dogs while she let her turkeys roam around in her yard? That's a nice, humane turkey raising operation you've got there, Novella Carpenter.

My next big level of irritation came from the Rabbit section, where the author repeatedly waxes poetic about raising rabbits and living some kind of bizarre romanticized version of French peasant life. Let me tell you, I'm sure there was NOTHING more awesome for a French peasant woman than being a peasant. Serfdom is so fun! Perhaps I am wrong and she is romanticizing the lives of French peasant Fascists in the 1920s and 30s. Clearly those were some fun times for all involved parties.

When not obsessing over picking and choosing certain aspects of French peasantry to claim as her own, Novella is picking and choosing certain aspects of urban life the same way. Soon after farming the empty lot next door, its owner attempted to sell the land for condo building. Novella is shocked and

aghast that someone would 1. tear down her beautiful garden and 2. want to live there. It never occurs to her that her white face is the reason why someone would want to live there- she is actively gentrifying an inner-city neighborhood populated mostly by people of color.

She doesn't mention this a lot until the end of the book, when the neighborhood's gentrification has spun far beyond what she has contributed to it- I guess because then she can get off without accepting any responsibility for it. She only directly mentions gentrification once before the end of the book- "Some might argue I had been causing a bit of gentrification myself. But [my] pigs-- and their odors-- had put a stop to that." On the other hand, some might argue that she was exploiting life in a neighborhood that the cops and code enforcement don't give a shit about so that she could raise pigs without anyone getting up in her grill about it, without actively contributing much of value to the neighborhood- only raising the rents and eventually displacing the original residents.

Novella is quick to talk about her work with the Oakland chapter of the new Black Panthers; she gives them crops from her garden. But she also seems to be annoying the shit out of her neighbors throughout. She invites the neighborhood kids over to meet the animals, only to kill them soon after, surely traumatizing the kids. She clearly wants to expose them to the realities of where their dinner comes from, but is a really shitty way to do it. I (the reviewer) am the daughter of a third-generation recreational hog farmer. I was raised to understand where food comes from; I saw it up close and personal throughout my childhood. I get that my childhood experience is relatively unique, but come on. You can't force this stuff on kids like that.

Speaking of coming from a long line of hog farmers, I found myself appalled by Novella's idiotic methods of hog farming. She calls it pig farming, but let's be serious- pigs weigh 120 pounds or less. These suckers are big-ass, mean hogs. Have you ever come up close and personal with a hog? Much like the Wu-Tang Clan, hogs ain't nothin' to fuck with. They will bite your hand, and then they will eat the fingers that came off in their mouth. When I was a kid I was told time and time again to stay the fuck away from any hogs that came around- they can and will eat children, if given the opportunity. Pigs will eat anything, and they constantly crave protein. Novella lets her hogs run, well, hog wild all over her neighborhood full of children. This was the part where I pretty much threw the book across my bedroom in disgust on every page. She seems to think that it's quaint and cute that her pigs keep escaping. It's not. It's ridiculously dangerous.

Her incredibly patient next-door neighbors complain about the pig stench (a stench which is indeed horrific), saying that it is leaving their young daughter on the verge of vomiting, and Novella merely offers to give them some pork chops once they're butchered. She probably knows that the neighbors could call the cops a hundred times and they'd never come to her dangerous neighborhood and take the hogs away. She also probably knows that there's a good chance that her neighbors are afraid to call the cops because they're immigrants. This is why she's farming in the inner city, rather than in a hipper neighborhood. It's not merely because of the low cost of living she's enjoying; it's because she can exploit the shit out of all of the poor immigrants around her without worrying about any repercussions. She might not consciously realize this, but it's clear after

reading the book.

Novella talks over and over again about wanting to have a farmer's life without having to give up the positive aspects of city life. I know a lot of farmers who would scoff at Novella calling herself a farmer. She is probably farming about a half-acre or so, if even, and she is doing it the expense of the sanity and, in some cases, safety of all who live around her. She speaks constantly about the community in her neighborhood, but she never checks in with any of the parents around to see if they mind having child-hungry hogs roaming around the neighborhood. Of course, she doesn't have to- the city cares about these kids even less than she does. Convenient for Novella, no?

In a lot of ways I really liked this book. I appreciate the author's commitment to growing her own food, to knowing where everything she eats comes from, and to have a hand in all of it. She is a fantastic writer, and thoroughly researched her book. That said, I can't help but think that she's kind of an asshole for all of the reasons I outlined above. There are ways to farm hogs in the city without doing it the way she does- she could move to a city like Detroit, Memphis or New Orleans with lots of urban acreage to squat (although none of those cities are as fabulously cool as SF, so she probably wouldn't dare), rather than doing it in such closely confined quarters. All I know is that if she lived next door to me in her neighborhood, I'd shoot her pigs in the head myself. And I'm a vegetarian. ...more

I absolutely loved this book. The parallels between Novella's backyard city farm and my own rural spread are uncanny. Both of us are running a veritable shit show where things go wrong, animals are cavorting along public roadways, animals die...and yet neither of us can imagine a life doing anything else. Novella is my kind of gal. She's ballsy, hilarious, adventurous and kind. The people she encounters through her adventure are so genuinely bizarre. I adore her homeless "neighbour" Bobby and feel her anguish at being treated unfairly by the slaughterhouse floozy. I truly wish Novella and I could hang out. I think we'd have a lot in common. She "gets" that eating meat isn't an act of hate. She appreciates the sacrifice of a life and the sheer amount of time and care each piece of meat take. Novella inspired me. Novella humbled me. I admit that prior to reading this book I felt urban farms were a "cutesy" idea, but not the same calibre as a "real" farm. Novella's foray into raising and slaughtering her own food shamed me into realizing that regardless of locale, urban farmers are indeed real farmers. Her 100-yard diet was awe inspiring. She has much more resolve than most of the "real" farmers I know out in the boonies.

Words cannot describe how much I enjoyed this book. I was sad when it was over. I will definitely be purchasing this book to enjoy again and again. This book was a treasure trove of awesome foody quotes. I highly recommend this one. ...more

## City Farm In London

I haven't been very good at sleeping lately, so for a while this is what I was reading in the middle of the night when I didn't want to think about anything or have any emotions. It's about a lady in Oakland who has a garden and some bees and chickens and ducks and turkeys and rabbits and pigs. Towards the end I realized she was giving away quite a bit of her eggs and honey and vegetables, and I wondered if maybe I ought to be a more generous person. As soon as I wondered this I fell asleep. When I went out to water my garden the next morning, I noticed that several of my tomatoes had been stolen. Generosity was being forced on me. A few days later I was mowing my lawn and my lawnmower kept dying so one of my neighbors who I've never talked to before came over to try to help me. We couldn't figure out what was wrong with it so he just let me borrow his and while we were talking his kid (I guess it was his kid) wandered over by my tomato plants and stroked the leaves. "That one just looooves tomatoes" his dad or whatever said. I have a suspect that I can't be mad at. He's like two years old and rides a tricycle and chews on a Silver Surfer action figure all day. Maybe if he keeps taking all my tomatoes his dad will feel obligated to let me use his lawnmower every week. ...more

I'm pretty surprised at how highly this book has been rated and how many impressive blurbs (Michael Pollan, NYT Book Review, Oprah) it has received. I picked it up to read as a comp title for a narrative I'm working on now, and I thought about putting it down at least half a dozen times as I made my way through it. It took me at least the first third of the book to become invested, and even then I only stuck with it because I wanted to read it for comparison.

Basically I think Novella tries too hard to paint the picture of who she "is"; it rang false to me and got old very quickly. She spends a good portion of the book establishing her unusually "kooky" personality and most of the descriptions left me rolling my eyes. There are multiple unnecessary references to political items that serve no other purpose than for her to point out "Ick, at least I'm not like that, am I right? \*nudge nudge\* If you fit this stereotype, you must be ashamed of yourself. You are clearly not my people." She continually recounts situations that attempt to display how she's the lovable and slightly crazy white lady in the dangerous ghetto--"Aren't I brave and edgy?" she seems to be saying.

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However, she does do a nice job of providing references for most of her research (there is an excellent bibliography for further reading) and the last section of the book (about raising pigs) is quite interesting, despite the rather annoying telling and retelling (I'm talking dozens of times) of Dumpster-diving escapades in order to feed her livestock.

Overall I think it has something unique to add to the "farm memoir" genre that is at its peak right now, but I think many of the other offerings are more worthy. ...more

## Farm In City Kl

I really wanted to like this book -- the author's voice and personality shine through her writing very clearly. She seemed like a snotty, self-important, shrill and unbalanced person. I kept reading, hoping that the author would undergo some transformation that would redeem her, and thinking that perhaps she wasn't as self centered as she made herself sound -- but when it got to the section about how demanding and rude she was to the woman who butchered her pigs -- I realized: the author is just a bossy, self-centered, judgmental hipster who can't even keep the streets straight (the Temescal street with the upscale Mexican, wood fired oven pizza and bakery is Telegraph, not Shattuck) because she's too busy obsessing over whatever non-existent drama she's invented for herself.

Seriously? Ghetto? I know plenty of people who live off MLK Jr in the 25-33 range -- it's not what I'd call a "ghetto" and I don't know anyone who lives there who would refer to it as such as often as this cracker hipster does. ...more

Novella can pull up a chair next to Cormac McCarthy and Clint Eastwood and sit at the all-time favorite badasses table.

## City Farm In Bristol

Novella Carpenter moved from rainy Seattle, WA to Oakland, CA. More accurately, she moved to Ghosttown, an especially rough part of Oakland where "tumbleweaves" roll across the abandoned lots. She took an apartment near an abandoned lot, and began a "squat garden," (illegal occupation of land you do not own for the purpose of growing plants). That squat garden grew into a squat farm, which grew into this book. The book is highly readable, often funny, and I was charmed by the author's perspective. Novella Carpenter moved from rainy Seattle, WA to Oakland, CA. More accurately, she moved to Ghosttown, an especially rough part of Oakland where "tumbleweaves" roll across the abandoned lots. She took an apartment near an abandoned lot, and began a "squat garden," (illegal occupation of land you do not own for the purpose of growing plants). That squat garden grew into a squat farm, which grew into this book. The book is highly readable, often funny, and I was charmed by the author's perspective, insight, politics and cursing. It's not a "how to" but there is a lot of learning to do. Carpenter cited sources, quoting other authors, and referring to older sustainable/farming projects (like Thoreau, who squatted at Emerson's Walden Pond or the history of "making do" in the Bay Area and America) in a thoughtful way. I felt a real sense of historical continuity - from survival tactics and historical urban farming during the Great Depression to Carpenter's parents' generation and their hippie "back to the land"ness that left them isolated and alone in rural areas. With all this context and history, Farm City brings the sense that this current "urban farming trend" is actually a natural and necessary progression in the history of urban space. I will say, however, if I never hear the phrase, "American thrift at its finest" ever again, it will be too soon. Carpenter has so many examples of "American thrift at its finest," I was like, whoa, there are so many "finest" (exclusive superlative) moments, I can't keep track!

From raised beds and beehives, it seems like such a slippery slope to raising birds for meat, then raising bunnies for meat, and then culminating in the raising two piglets into enormous pigs, seeing them through butchering and curing. The butchering and breaking down is fairly graphic, so if you aren't prepared to hear about the death of the thanksgiving heirloom turkey, the Big Sleep of a flock of chickens, and "pulling off the pajamas" of a rabbit, etc, then this might be a good book to skip. The hard part for me was this conundrum that yes, it is very difficult (maybe impossible?) to raise enough vegetarian protein for a human to be sustained on a small urban farm, and if you are going to eat meat, I agree with Novella that there's no better way than to raise it yourself, feed it well, know that it had a happy life, died a humane and respectful death, and that the meat was not contaminated or treated badly before it got to your table. But after decades of vegetarianism, it would take a better person than me to become a hog farmer. I'm left feeling like, "okay, I guess I'm just inherently less committed to sustaining my own nutritional needs, oh well, guess I'll go to Taco Bell." I am not sure that was the intention. I grew up on a similar (but less hardcore!) "back to the land" hippie-parent farming experiment, like Novella Carpenter, and I raised guinea hens and held a baby lamb that grew up to be lamb chops, and that drove me to vegetarianism... so I don't know how I fit into the larger locavore picture, despite my very best intentions.

Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer

Novella does a month-long 100 yard diet challenge, which is cool, and then she starts musing on the importance of sharing food to strength relationships and social bonds. How much smug self-satisfaction do you get if, at the end of the month, you realize you haven't broken bread with your sweetheart in 30 days? Total bummer. I love eating meals with my sweetheart and our pals, so that 100-yard diet would not be a worthwhile challenge for me. All in all, I am really glad I read this book but I don't think I will read it again, and I will probably steer clear of books about animal slaughter until I feel a little less emotional about baby piglets and turkey poults. Yes, I sound like a big tittybaby and I don't care. Oh, and I audiobook'd this, which I think was a fantastic way to read it. I probably would not have enjoyed it as much if it had not brought me such entertainment in my commute. ...more

This is the best memoir of urban farming I have ever read.

Novella relays her joys and hardships of farming in Oakland with enthusiasm, intelligence, candor and humor. Aside from growing vegetables and fruit, she merrily upgrades her stock from chickens and turkeys to rabbits finally ending at pigs.

I laughed so hard at the image of hauling pigs in the back of a station wagon! I'm thinking of making hubby Tal read it so he can realize that just chickens aren't so bad in comparison.

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Farm City is seriously fantastic...if you have any interest in growing food in the city, or in learning about how people grow food in a city you need to read this! ...more