

Accidental Shepherd: How a California Girl Rescued an Ancient Mountain Farm in Norway

Liese Greensfelder

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As a young woman in 1972, Liese Greensfelder took what was supposed to be a short-term summer job working on a sheep farm in the mountains of rural Norway. She recounts what happened instead in her engaging memoir *Accidental Shepherd*.

When Greensfelder arrived in the farming community of Hovland, she learned that the farmer who hired her, Johannes, was in the hospital recovering from a stroke. So rather than learning his trade from him, she needed to rely on the generosity of neighbors as she became the de facto head of Johannes's farm. What was already a difficult assignment proved even more complicated because of the farm's condition and lack of modern equipment. With her employer still recovering, Greensfelder extended her stay and wound up spending a full year keeping the farm afloat.

The book describes these and other daunting challenges: Greensfelder learned to muck out sheep pens, store silage to feed the animals in winter, and milk the farmer's cow. From gruesome and emotional descriptions of slaughter season to visceral scenes of rough winter, *Accidental Shepherd* makes the decades-old experiences engrossing and often educational. Johannes's neighbors become important characters as well, serving as Greensfelder's teachers, helpers, possible romantic interests, and friends.

The length of Greensfelder's stay meant she experienced the region's Christmas and Easter traditions, described in joyful terms. Such scenes show how much she became part of the farm community. Other standout chapters describe venturing into the mountains to find sheep and bring them back to the farm at the end of summer, managing a troublesome heifer experiencing first heat, and intense arguments with her ungrateful and demanding boss.

Packed with great details and memorable characters, *Accidental Shepherd* is a compelling memoir about the myriad challenges of farm life.

JEFF FLEISCHER (January / February 2025)

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