



Foothold on a Hillside: Memories of a Southern Illinoisan (Repr of 1986 ed) (Shawnee Books)

Charless Caraway

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In a style reminiscent of the master storytellers of yore, Charless Caraway recounts the story of his life, as a man and a boy, on small farms in Saline and Jackson counties, particularly around Eldorado, Makanda, and Etherton Switch. He makes no bones about the hardships of those "old days," first helping his father eke out a living from the land, then scrambling for a living as a sharecropper and fruit picker, as he scrimped and saved for the day when he and his young wife, Bessie Mae Rowan Caraway, could buy a piece of land of their own.

The one-room school, the general store, the trips by wagon over roads that choked you in summer and swallowed you in winter, the home that burned: all are described in a matter-of-fact yet moving way. Many of the locations, buildings, and people are represented in equally unromanticized photographs from the family's collection. Some of the stories and photos recall the common disasters of the frontier: drought, flood, and the tornado of 1925.

It is clear from these stories that each aspect of life exacted a price, but the Caraways paid that price without regret and rallied to go on their way. Charless and his family and friends fill this book with courage, strength, and an unshakable faith in the value of human endeavor.

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