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For a 16-year-old boy out in the world alone for the first time, every day's an education in the hard work and boredom of migrant labor; every day teaches him something more about friendship, or hunger, or profanity, or lust—always lust. He learns how a poker game, or hitching a ride, can turn deadly. He discovers the secret sadness and generosity to be found on a lonely farm in the middle of nowhere. Then he joins up with a carnival and becomes a grunt, running a ride and shilling for the geek show. He's living the hard carny life and beginning to see the world through carny eyes. He's tough. Cynical. By the end of the summer he's pretty sure he knows it all. Until he meets Ruby.

The Beet Fields: Memories of a Sixteenth Summer Details

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From Reader Review The Beet Fields: Memories of a Sixteenth Summer for online ebook

Ash Rocketship says

My first Gary Paulsen, chosen for taking place in my current home of North Dakota. A nice, quick read with artful and easy rhythmic language. Felt like a book old white guys would be intensely nostalgic about. Enjoyable though.

Sarah Bonila says

Beautifully written, lyrical book with a lot of quiet passion and desperation. What I loved most about this book was what wasn't revealed. All the holes in the narrative and the character were deliberately left unfilled in a way that not only allows the reader to take the place of the nameless main character, but to follow the narrative like retracing the steps of a dream. Lovely read. Great for young boys, as well.

Hannah G says

The end is totally inappropriate.... It wrecked the book for me...

Peter Adler says

The book the beet fields is about a younger gary paulsen, when he was in high school and he talks about how his family was rough with him and how he ran away and had to hide from cops. He jumped from job to job when where he would hitchhike all over the country just looking for work. Then he gets a job harvesting beets where he learns what true hard work is, he works with Mexicans and can not keep up with them at all, they work harder and faster than him right in the beginning and his hands hurt all the time, But the mexicans accept him as one of their own and they feed him. He talks about how much culture they had and how their food was amazing. But that job ended and he had to get a new job so he went to the carnival and got a job as a carny where he meets this beautiful girl that is one of the carnivals dancers and they have a romantic relationship. This book that Gary Paulsen wrote was great I could not put it down at all. I hope everyone gets the chance to read this book.

Sylvia says

Cautiously I give it a four. The writing is stellar. My reservations are twofold: first, with the beginning where the story hints that the boy's alcoholic mother tries to have sex with him. Based on this incident, he runs away. Descriptions of the heat, the beet fields and life with Mexican workers have the reader wanting to get into the shade. The boy's (always nameless) adventure continue with a crooked cop, hitchhiking with disastrous results, and working at two more unusual jobs. After his first sexual encounter, (my second reservation)the boy continues running. Definitely not a middle school book, but one for a mature reader. The

writing makes the book a fast, although thoughtful read. Reminiscent of Steinbeck.

Raylee Gifford says

This novel follows the story of the boy as he works during his first summer on his own. He runs away from home when he is 16 and finds a job thinning beats. He learns a lot from the migrant workers that he works with as they take care of each other and he finds a family of sorts. As a group they move from farm to farm until he finally leaves them for a tractor job. After working on this farm for a while he is taken in by the local police for being a runaway. After stealing all of his money the deputy leaves him alone to discover that the jail isn't locked. The boy escapes the law and finds his way to an old run down farm where a lonely mother living in the past dwells. When they go to the local carnival the boy stays and becomes a carny. He soon adopts their hard carny ways until he meets Ruby the wife of his employer who dances for the local farmers. The boy loses his virginity with Ruby and then the man lies about his age to enlist in the army. I wouldn't recommend this book to very many people, maybe very mature teenagers.

Stephen says

This book by the author of Hatchet will probably appeal to slightly older boys but NOT to their parents. This book is grittier and tells of a young man's coming of age but involves that taboo subject, sex. It also involves working as a migrant laborer, being cheated by white farmers but being aided his fellow laborers, being robbed by a crooked policeman, being sheltered by an old woman who's lost a son and even, for a time, working as a carny.

At just 160 pages, this book is a fast read and will appeal to a number of young men who'd be turned off by books that depict similar themes in a somewhat less graphic way. The writing reminds me of John Steinbeck while most other reviewers seem to mention Hemingway.

Many young men consider losing their virginity a big part of the coming of age saga but never expect to read about in literature. This book defies those expectations. And yet, it's retold in a fairly innocent and natural manner without being overly lewd.

I'd recommend this book highly, that is, unless I was a teacher and wanted to keep my job.

Rachel N. says

Narrated by a nameless 16 year old boy who runs away from home when his alcoholic mother tries to molest him. He ends up thinning beets on a farm, the first of several jobs he holds in the story. Towards the end of the book the book changes from farm work to being about carnies, kind of an abrupt switch. I'm not sure how much of the book was autobiographical. I read this solely because I needed a book set in North Dakota and didn't want to read anything too long. It was an okay book but nothing special in terms of coming of age books.

R Reddebrek says

An interesting quick read. I've checked this out from my local library several times over the past two years. There's something about the way the story is structured that grabs me. On the surface its a simple coming of age story, but it also touches on abuse, attitudes to sex, race and discrimination.

I found it very appealing in how the "boy" is able to make friends with social outcasts simply by treating them with respect and dignity and it was interesting to follow him on his journey through rural South Dakota to meet the next unusual character.

It is however extremely cynical. While the boy is able to befriend and rely on migrant workers, traumatised widows and the like, virtually every example of legitimate society he meets right up to the epilogue is cruel and exploitative. The farmers who hire labourers are racist and exploitative, and the local cop is corrupt.

Evan Hall says

GARY PAULSEN CATEGORY

The authenticity of Paulsen's story--which he has admitted to be at least in part auto-biographical--makes it endearing and compensates somewhat for its simplistic nature. "The Beet Fields" is a story about a 16 year old boy who has run away from home. Unfortunately, the nobility of some of the characters and even the protagonist is mitigated somewhat by the novel's obsession with sex. The take-home message of the book seems to be that just when you think guys are deep, complex individuals, you find out you're wrong and they're really just the same predictable, one-dimensional horndogs you always imagined them to be. Most hero journeys follow the hero as he overcomes some great societal or personal obstacle and achieves a greater good. In Paulsen's novel, that greater good is nothing more than bedding an attractive woman, and when the protagonist has done that, the book "triumphantly" concludes.

Devon Kelley says

The Beet Fields

The Beet Fields is a good book about a sixteen year old boy who is on his own, and spending his summer working hard laboring work and learning new things on his way. The main character in this book is the young migrant worker, being cheated out of his pay, working many hours and trying to make enough to live off of. Later on, the boy is introduced to the carnival and learns carny scams. The boy came a long way in work coming from the beet fields where his pay is cancelled from the use of the owners hoe and the price of meals. My favorite character is "the Boy" because he is a very hard working man and is just doing what he can to survive.

I can relate to the boy in many ways. I come from a family of hard working farmers and spent most of my childhood working on and around the farm. As long as i can remember, i was milking cows, driving tractors, and helping on the farm without pay. For most of the time i wasn't really worried about pay because i was young and did not have any bills to pay but as time went on, i wanted to be able to buy my own stuff, make a little money but it was nearly impossible considering it was a family farm. I have worked hours on end in extreme heat just like the boy in the beet fields.

I really enjoyed this book by Gary Paulsen. I liked how i could relate to the boy and know how he feels. My favorite part was the part when he joins the carnival and is introduced to the carnival stripper. The author did a very good job relating this book to its time period and conditions. There was very good descriptions of the

characters, and was full of fun. I don't think he could have done a better job. I would recommend this book to anyone. The book pulls you in fast and keeps you interested. It was an amazing book and I encourage you to read it!

Jacob Baggot says

I really enjoyed this book when I read it last year. It follows a teenage boy, after running away from home, in his search for a good job and a way to make a life for himself. He starts off with working in the beet fields of Montana in 1955, first being seemingly cheated out of his earning by his boss and not being able to make almost any money. Later, the large group of Mexican workers take him in after they find out that he can climb to the top of the barn rafters to catch pigeons to make into stew. He later moves on to other jobs and travels throughout the north central states. I loved this book because of how descriptive it is and how it paints the picture of how his life was in the story.

Josiah says

I'll say this upfront as a service to Gary Paulsen fans who don't know: *The Beet Fields: Memories of a Sixteenth Summer* is the same basic story as *Tiltawhirl John*, a novel by Paulsen published in 1977. Without mentioning *Tiltawhirl John* by name, Paulsen acknowledges in the Author's Note to *The Beet Fields* that portions of the narrative appeared decades earlier in a more fictionalized form, but years of honing his craft had given him finer tools to tell the story, and that's why he wrote *The Beet Fields*. While the central timeline is similar, reflecting the autobiographical nature of the two novels, there's more than enough difference that readers can enjoy both. The boy (as in many of Gary Paulsen's works, the main character goes unnamed) never had a nice home life, but with his father in the military and his mother getting so drunk that she starts making illicit advances on him, he runs away in search of his own future. It's 1955 and the boy is sixteen, but he's ready to work hard for a living to escape his mess of a home. If only he knew the path that would put him on.

Hoeing beets is brutal, boring work. The boy is paid a pittance and gives most of it back to the farmer for room and board, but worse is that he's in this alone, as opposed to the Mexican beet hoers who operate as a team and have one another to lean on when the work gets too rough for any one of them to handle. The boy longs for community like that, and only starts to come out ahead in his job when the Mexicans extend their hand in friendship. They teach him tricks for efficient labor, and the money the boy earns piles up, though the daily grind still takes every bit of energy he has. He spends the rest of beet season traveling from farm to farm with the Mexicans, until another offer gives him pause. Beet season won't last forever, one farmer warns, and he could use a disciplined worker like the boy to help on his farm. It's the presence of the farmer's teenage daughter, in truth, that convinces the boy to bid his Mexican friends farewell. He fantasizes about getting close to Lynette, but there isn't time for flirtation on a farm at harvest season. The boy adjusts to the new variety of backbreaking labor, and the money pours in. This isn't a bad life, not like living with his parents, until a law officer gets wind that the farmer's boy might be a runaway, and hauls him in to find out. Shortly thereafter the boy is a wanted fugitive, and life on the road begins.

From getting picked up as a hitchhiker by a Hungarian immigrant (an aside that ends with jarring suddenness and violence), to helping a grieving old woman on a farm regain her sense of self, and then on to the carnies (who offer the boy a lifestyle unlike anything he's known), the boy is on the sort of adventure a bestselling author would want to write about forty-five years later. The world is a rainbow of crazy, strong flavors and

no one has a taste for them all, but the boy feels good about carny life, shilling for Bobby the "Wild Man from Borneo", helping Taylor scam customers on the Tilt-A-Whirl, and luring hormonal men to ogle as Taylor's woman, Ruby, puts on a striptease. Coming of age in literature happens in almost as many ways as there are novels, and the boy feels himself becoming a man in the garish glow and noise of the traveling carnival. He's made a living in many ways, but the primal heat of being a carny is his favorite. What a life.

The Beet Fields feels raw and immediate, and its insight into the beauty of Mexican immigrant culture is an asset, but in my opinion the book pales beside *Tiltawhirl John*. That earlier novel featured confrontations that were more intense, notably the boy's dispute with the beet farmer who holds him practically as a slave and viciously beats him when the boy fights back, and the knife fight at the end between T-John and an old enemy, a clash built up to with deep, visceral foreboding. *Tiltawhirl John* is a superb commentary on the way anxiety can affect us like a toxin we can't rid our system of, damaging us even as we try to move on from it. "Tasting the thunder" is a thrilling lifestyle, but not everyone can handle life on the edge, and *Tiltawhirl John* is an enlightening exploration of that truth and others. Maybe *The Beet Fields* is closer to Gary Paulsen's own true story, but it isn't as exciting or substantive as *Tiltawhirl John*, and I'm not sure there's much of a point to it. Curiously, the two books share the fact that their titles describe only half the story; *Tiltawhirl John* indicates the carny half and nothing about hoeing beets, whereas *The Beet Fields* mentions the farming aspect with no hint of the carny stuff. Overall, I loved *Tiltawhirl John* and consider *The Beet Fields* an average book, though worth reading. Gary Paulsen always is. You might not be sure what you were supposed to get out of this book after you finish, but it'll leave you thinking, and I say that's a fair trade for a few hours' investment.

Chase says

This book is about a kid who ran away from his house. He joins up with some mexicans and works on some farms. Then he gets caught by the police. He runs away from them and joins a carnival. The boy reminded me of myself, becasue he is wild. There is an old lady that reminds me of my old neighbor they act the same. The cop reminds me of my brother because they are greedy. I really liked this book and I really recommend it.

Wanda says

Good, but

Great read with a very abrupt ending. I expected more and do not like being dropped like a hot potato. Poor way to end a story.
