



Dirty Chick: Adventures of an Unlikely Farmer

Antonia Murphy

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“One month into our stay, we’d managed to dispatch most of our charges. We executed the chickens. One of the cats disappeared, clearly disgusted with our urban ways. And Lucky [the cow] was escaping almost daily. It seemed we didn’t have much of a talent for farming. And we still had eleven months to go.”

Antonia Murphy, you might say, is an unlikely farmer. Born and bred in San Francisco, she spent much of her life as a liberal urban cliché, and her interactions with the animal kingdom rarely extended past dinner.

But then she became a mother. And when her eldest son was born with a rare, mysterious genetic condition, she and her husband, Peter, decided it was time to slow down and find a supportive community. So the Murphys moved to Purua, New Zealand—a rural area where most residents maintained private farms, complete with chickens, goats, and (this being New Zealand) sheep. The result was a comic disaster, and when one day their son had a medical crisis, it was also a little bit terrifying.

Dirty Chick chronicles Antonia’s first year of life as an artisan farmer. Having bought into the myth that farming is a peaceful, fulfilling endeavor that allows one to commune with nature and live the way humans were meant to live, Antonia soon realized that the reality is far dirtier and way more disgusting than she ever imagined. Among the things she learned the hard way: Cows are prone to a number of serious bowel ailments, goat mating involves an astounding amount of urine, and roosters are complete and unredeemable assholes.

But for all its traumas, Antonia quickly embraced farm life, getting drunk on homemade wine (it doesn’t cause hangovers!), making cheese (except for the cat hair, it’s a tremendously satisfying hobby), and raising a baby lamb (which was addictively cute until it grew into a sheep). Along the way, she met locals as colorful as the New Zealand countryside, including a seasoned farmer who took a dim view of Antonia’s novice attempts, a Maori man so handy he could survive a zombie apocalypse, and a woman proficient in sculpting alpaca heads made from their own wool.

Part family drama, part cultural study, and part cautionary tale, *Dirty Chick* will leave you laughing, cringing, and rooting for an unconventional heroine.

Dirty Chick: Adventures of an Unlikely Farmer Details

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From Reader Review *Dirty Chick: Adventures of an Unlikely Farmer* for online ebook

Denise Westlake says

A fun and quick book of very interesting farm animal facts. Author seems to be quite crazy, and equally lovable. Some pieces don't seem to fit, but so what? Just enjoy it.

Lori says

I was a goodreads first reads winner of this book. it is an ARC. I had a lot of fun reading this humorous book. Antonia Murphy did a good job writing her memoir. This is one of those "fish out of water" stories. Antonia and her husband Peter sailed from San Francisco to New Zealand. After living in the city in their adopted home. The couple decide they want to live in the country and raise all kinds of animals. They are also parents to two small children. A five year old boy and three year old girl. their five year old Silas was diagnosed with developmental delays and they felt he would have a better chance in a school that was located in a rural area.

This family have no experience raising animals on a farm but they are brave and take on the challenges. Eventually they have a goat, a cow, chickens, alpacas. Baby lambs. the funny part is they had no experience with any of them. they are learning as they go along with some mishaps along the way. I found this book a blast to read. I like those fish out of water type stories. as of this review the family has moved to a home of their own still on a farm and learning the frustrations and joys of a farm family. Antonia Murphy has a great sense of humor. those of you who enjoy reading about animals of all kinds may find this a nice book to read. I did.

John says

At first I wasn't sure whether I'd really get into it the story, based on the author's politics (left wing Bay Area), but that turned out not to be much of a problem. For the most part it's the story of settling down in a small community. Antonia (pronounced An-tone-EE-ah, as in the Cather story) is easy to relate to as a character; her husband works in an outside tech job (which is how they qualified to emigrate), so they aren't large scale farmers, more that they happen to have several critters. It might help to be an animal person a bit to appreciate the story fully, but I'm not and rarely wished she'd move along. There are stories involving friends and neighbors, as well as the challenges regarding their disabled son. Their three-year-old daughter I found a tad precocious at times, but that could have been partly due to her odd syntax (as though English were her second language). All in all, the book is definitely recommended!

The author's choice to read the book herself was a wise one. In spite of her disclaimer that her accents may not be the greatest, she seemed to do NZ ones quite well. As a matter of fact, she might even be a pretty good narrator if they were looking for another source of income.

Julie says

I haven't read too many books lately that I didn't want to end, and I could have kept going reading this one. Antonia Murphy and her husband decide to leave their lives in the US and sail to NZ, and after a few years and two small kids find themselves housesitting for a year in rural New Zealand. Left to look after the animals at the small holding they live in, they gradually acquire a rather motley crew of adopted animals, alpacas, chickens, a rooster, goats and dogs.

With their two young children, fitting into the local community is a bit of a challenge, especially as their eldest Silas has special needs. It sounds like they found the perfect spot though with a school that is able to adapt easily to his needs.

I loved this honest and highly amusing story of novice farmers. I guess a lot of us have dreams of a small farm, but after reading so many stories about animal poop you might want to change your mind. I don't have too many illusions about it being easy, but this makes me think I would be mad to create that much work for myself.

Marianne says

“By now I’d learned that country life is not a pastoral painting. Sure, at various times during the year you might see fluffy white lambs prancing in the tall grass, but those moments are rare. Real country life, it turns out, involves blood, shit and worms.”

Dirty Chick: Adventures of an Unlikely Farmer is the first memoir by magazine journalist, Antonia Murphy. When the cost of health insurance in San Francisco sent Antonia Murphy looking for somewhere to migrate to, New Zealand looked promising for several reasons, and before long, Antonia and husband Peter were sailing the Pacific in a south-westerly direction. Eventually, they found themselves renting a house in the North Island town of Purua for a year while the owners were in Germany. And somehow acquiring animals: three alpacas, two cats, two dogs, a goat, two calves, a lamb, a rooster with insatiable libido, a flock of chickens, three turkeys and a pair of ducks.

By this time they had a developmentally delayed son and a feisty daughter. Luckily, they also had the help of a capable niece, and the support of a bunch of wonderful neighbours: “John scowled when I spoke, and I realised there was a time when I would have thought he was angry at me. But this was a man who’d offered to shave a sheep’s arse for free. What’s a better indication of friendship than that?” and “‘We’re all a bit nutty to be out here,’ Abi agreed. ‘You’d have to be really. It’s not like any of us knows what we’re doing, with the animals and this country life...’” describe a few of the friends they made in Purua.

As she learns about chicken anatomy, goat care, milking, alpaca shearing, cheese making and wine fermentation, Murphy includes plenty of humour: descriptions of rapist ducks, alpaca noses, vampire worms, an ovine Brazilian, chicken physiotherapy, the perils of calf transport and an addiction to lambs: “That’s how that lamb seduced me. It was cute like a baby, but unlike my own children, it didn’t whine or annoy me....I felt sorry for people who didn’t have lambs, because their lives seemed so grey and predictable. Unlike me, they didn’t live in hyper-elevated lamb reality, full of cute things and sparkles.”

This memoir is delightfully funny as well being interesting and moving. Further adventures of the Unlikely

Farmer will be eagerly anticipated. An excellent debut.

Lisa says

Loving Chickens made me pick this book up. The front cover got me. I have not had a laugh out loud book in such a long time. Antonia and Peter have the most amazing life moving from San Francisco to New Zealand (actually sailing across) to become hobby farmers. It happens by chance really. They rent a place with a few chickens a dog and a cat and then keep adding more animals (19 all up) and more crazy funny stories. I will never think of a duck the same or an Alpaca for that matter. Antonia learned to make fruit wines and goat cheeses. But life isn't all fun & laughter for Antonia & Peter they have a son Silas who is mentally delayed who a few scary times at hospital with fitting and no one knowing why. But like everything they do, they carry on forward chin up. And Silas is a happy little boy. They also have a cute little girl Antonia calls "Magnolia". They live in a wonderful community of people. Who turn out to become their very good friends. I found this book so easy to read. It is a fairly short book, 255 pages. Whilst ready I felt like she could be me in some ways. Some may find the language a bit rough in places but thats farm life!

Armelle says

I received this book for free as a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

The adventures of an American couple raising a family in a fairly rural community in New Zealand, *Dirty Chick* is a quick and quirky read.

Some people will be put off by the graphic descriptions of farm life - and there is an awful lot of poop in this book - but if you can make it through the introduction, you're mostly home free.

I can also imagine that some people may take exception to what sometimes seems like a snarky tome when discussing her disabled son (an alien...), to me it seemed like it was probably a pretty realistic description of her feelings - and it's clear that many of their decisions were based on what was best for him.

I liked it. I liked the people and the place. It's well written and easy to read. In some places it feels more like a conversation you'd have with friends while sharing a bottle of wine (and there's more than a little wine in the book, too...)I liked the alpacas and the goats and the kids and the dogs and the, well, you get the idea.

Randal White says

I received this book as an early reviewer from Library Thing.

This is an entirely satisfying book. There were times when it made me laugh out loud. And times when it made me shake my head in wonder at how the author could have such a fantastic, irreverent sense of humor in the face of all she had to deal with. And there were times it made me cringe in revulsion at some of the horrors of farm life. It's an easy, quick read. I would recommend it to anyone who ever dreamed of moving

to a farm and raising livestock. Murphy doesn't romanticize the pursuit like so many other books in this genre. She pulls no punches in describing her experiences. Honestly, how can you not like a book that has racist camel zombies (alpacas), stripper calves with satan tongues, cheeses that grow cat hair, and vampire worms? WARNING: if you are offended by salty language and strange descriptions of animal behavior, this book may not be for you. Especially the prologue.

I am looking forward to Murphy's next book.

Donna Davis says

Writing humor is risky business. If one writes mainstream fiction or nonfiction and the book is not well reviewed, of course it hurts--writing is always personal, at some level--but few things are as painful as the I-thought-this-was-going-to-be-funny review. In writing about her own family and friends, albeit with a few small changes to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned, Antonia Murphy takes her bleeding heart in her own two hands and offers it up to the public for consumption.

Personally, I have never laughed so hard in my life, or at least not recently. My thanks go to her and to the Goodreads first reads program for the ARC.

If my earlier reference to Murphy and the bleeding heart made you wince, you won't want to read her book, either, because it has lots of gooey, graphic, gross stuff in it. It is edgy humor out there on the edge of wild, like the hinterlands of New Zealand where she has made her home. Well, see for yourself. This is from the prologue, so it doesn't ruin the book for you:

"As I watched my goat eat her placenta, I was mostly impressed...Pearl had always been a strict vegan, so her sudden craving for raw meat showed a real taste for adventure...The placenta draped gracefully from her hindquarters, a translucent pink train enclosing a network of blue veins. There was a dark red, ropy thing inside, heavy with blood and the color of liver. It was this that Pearl tucked into first, craning her neck to nibble and swallow..."

As I read, I tried to analyze what it was that made her humor work. Part of it was her sense of remove, the dry commentary of the detached observer even when she is right in the middle of everything. But every now and again, something will happen in her personal life that shatters the entire I'm-just-watching thing. For one thing, she has two children, and when one meets with a really dangerous misadventure, Murphy is nearly consumed with the fear, the stress, the confusion that every mother on this planet, save for a frightening few misfits, would feel at such a time. So we laugh at all the icky stuff and her reactions to same, but now and again we remember that she is vulnerable to the same nightmares that we are. It gives us a stake in what comes next, and between the hilarity (most of the book) and the pain (deftly meted in small doses), there is no putting this book down once you reach a certain point.

Here's how it shook out at our house: I would read a passage to myself, then burst out laughing. I would hustle straight past my husband, a man of delicate sensibilities with regard to animals and biological detail. I knew he did not want to hear it, or read it, or even be reminded of it. Instead, I made for the younger daughter's room. She is a teenager with a great lust for gore, so of course she loved it. And I know that if I had headed for the adult-son-who-sometimes-lives-here, he would have chortled merrily also.

The narrative of this amateur adventure at farming just sat on my giggle button. Murphy, rather than wanting to control and fix every little (and large) thing that occurs, has this brilliantly mellow approach. Wow, the

goats keep attacking the cars. A neighbor observes that eventually, they will break her windshield. Huh. Well...she loves those goats, so she isn't going to "dead" them (her daughter Miranda's word). She doesn't want to sell them, and after all, who would want them? And fences are very expensive. She is, after all, just a renter.

Occasional visions of the landlords returning to find their property trashed would wink into my head, then wink away.

Every time I think Murphy and her husband are in over their heads and everything is completely out of control, she takes on an additional project. When all is falling apart, why not find something more to add to it?

So there's Jabberwocky, the rapist rooster. They might have to dead him. Everyone likes baby chicks, and the hens can't get preggers without him, but the thing is, he's psychotic. Eventually she comes to understand that this is how it is with roosters. They start bad and get worse, and sooner or later, one generally HAS to dead them.

Good god. See what she's done to me?

I have four more outstanding quotes, but they are too close to the end of the book. and it would ruin it for you. And the fact is, almost every single page has at least one quote that is fucking brilliant. I think I mostly marked the pages that showed transitions occurring in the plot, and that's all well and good for academics, but this is not an essay, this is a review, and therein lies the distinction.

Because you, dear reader, don't want to know how the book ends, and you are capable of analyzing all its nuances yourself, should you choose to do so. On the other hand, you could also just get the book, have an outstanding weekend curled up in your favorite reading spot, and then be done with it.

For those not grossed out by the references in this review, this is a sure fire hit. Pick it up when you have the blues, and I guarantee that in minutes your worries will be smaller.

When you look at it that way, ordering a copy of this book is really the sensible thing to do.

Sarah Scott says

I received this book as a member of LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

I was actually surprised at just how much I enjoyed reading *Dirty Chick* by Antonia Murphy. I was concerned it would be a little too trying-to-be-funny with no actual humor, which can be painful to read. I was pleasantly surprised at the genuine laugh-out-loud situations that filled the pages, along with a few tender moments (particularly when discussing her developmentally delayed son, Silas).

There is definitely no sugar-coating here with regards to certain farming techniques - from the various types

of animal poop being stepped on, picked up, and shoved in her purse, to duck rapists, there is certainly a sense of almost raunchy humor that may not be for the very weak stomached (yet adds a certain character to the book and is the cause of many funny moments).

This is a somewhat short novel (approx. 250 pages) and an even quicker read. Murphy spends just enough time on each situation/story before moving to the next - keeping the reader engaged and entertained on every page. Regardless of what page you open to, you will find a outlandish story being told with a hilarious narrative.

My only complaint throughout the memoir was some of the situations/descriptions of Murphy's choices seemed incredibly naive - but my enjoyment with the book as a whole allowed me to easily overlook these moments. I look forward to future works by Antonia Murphy.

Elizabeth says

I really enjoyed this autobiographical story of an American couple and their mishaps as beginner farmers in New Zealand. Some parts were hilarious, others were disgusting and many were brutally honest about family life. Easy and enjoyable read.

Kara-karina says

Listening to or reading autobiographies is something I haven't done since I was a teenager, but when I had an opportunity to review Dirty Chick I had to grab it with both hands. You see, Antonia's adventures as a newly minted farmer is something I could relate to and was intensely curious to compare with my own experience.

Personal reasons aside, this book is funny, at times hysterically comical, smart, self-deprecating and bittersweet. Antonia narrates it herself and does a fantastic job depicting various accents and characters of her friends and family. It's also a very quick listen (I recall sawing wood while I was at it).

Antonia and Peter move to New Zealand from San Fransisco in search of more affordable life, and when their son is born with a rare genetic disorder, they decide to stay for the health system and a way of life which would afford him an existence as close to normal as possible.

Renting a farm house in rural New Zealand for a year, Antonia decides to have a go at being a farmer imagining this picturesque, wonderfully calm living where she potters round and create these wonderful artisanal produce for sale. The reality is far from what she imagined.

Soon she is overrun by a herd of animals who are more pets than valuable produce, the fence is collapsing, the goats ruin any cars parked nearby, there is sh*t everywhere, her kimchi is a disaster, her cheese is mouldy and her evenings are spent in a blissful haze due to the copious amounts of homemade wine.

However, the sense of community is wonderful, her friends are always ready to lend a hand or a roast chicken, and when disasters strike (and they do!) all people around her unite to help.

I mentioned that this book is bittersweet, and I admit, because it's mostly humorous, when something bad

happens it cuts you worse than usual. I had tears in my eyes a few times, but I finished this book with sense of wonder and I felt inspired.

Very much recommended.

Margo says

I've been on a streak lately of reading memoirs / nonfiction accounts of people who have made the change to smallholding / lifestyle farming. This was the first book I've managed to find that's actually NZ based tho - and bonus that the author is actually Californian, as I am. It was nice reading a similar-but-different account and having someone to relate to and that feels like a friend, though I only know her through the book. I do need a picture of the ear headbands tho....

Jessica says

Antonia Murphy grew up in the San Francisco area and never dreamed she would be a farmer. But when she and her husband are expecting their first child they decide to look for a slower and more affordable place to live than California. They settle in New Zealand, where it quickly becomes evident that most people there grow and raise at least some of their own food. Quickly Antonia has dreams of making homemade goat cheese and eating farm fresh eggs, but the reality is much harder and dirtier than she imagined.

I was really excited about this one because I love a good farm memoir, but I was really disappointed with this one. Antonia seems like a glutton for punishment and even when it's glaringly obvious they aren't doing a great job with the animals they have she keeps getting more. Their life was so chaotic that it stressed me out just reading about it! And to top it off her older son is special needs and throughout all this animal chaos they are also trying to deal with his seizures and find the right medication to help him. I appreciate self-deprecating humor, but she just seemed really dumb to keep adding animals that they didn't know how to take care of to their already chaotic home - that they were RENTING! So, all along they knew there was a deadline when they would have to move, so why keeping adding more and more animals?! Instead of being funny, this book was stressful and not well done. The only redeeming part was the last 2-3 chapters when the community rallies together when a family loses someone unexpectedly. Overall, there are MANY other much better farm memoirs out there.

Marcela (BookaholicCat) says

The blurb summarizes perfectly what *Dirty Chick: Adventures of an Unlikely Farmer* by Antonia Murphy is all about. I will just add a few things to convince you to read/listen to this book.

This is my first time listening to an autobiography. If I'm honest I never thought I would enjoy a book like *Dirty Chick: Adventures of an Unlikely Farmer*, but after I read the blurb and listened to the sample I decided to step out of my comfort zone and give this book a chance and I'm soooo glad I did it. *Dirty Chick: Adventures of an Unlikely Farmer* is funny, informative, self-deprecating, emotional, and highly entertaining. I not only had an amazing time listening to this audiobook, I also learned a lot of things about farming, farm animals and more... Let me tell you, after listening to this audiobook I have new respect

towards ducks... I used to like them, now... I'm kind of afraid of them... I won't be able to see them with the same light as I used to... Why? You need to read/listen to this book, but I give you a two-world clue... Rapist ducks. Something else I won't be able to see in the same light again are Alpacas noses.

Another very interesting tidbit I learned with this book is that homemade wines don't give hangover. Why I didn't know this? *runs to look for homemade wine recipes*

Read the rest of my review at [The Bookaholic Cat](#)
