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It's Only Slow Food Until You Try to Eat It: Misadventures of a Suburban Hunter Gatherer

Bill Heavey

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A longtime contributor to *Field and Stream*, Bill Heavey knew more than a little about hunting and fishing when he embarked on an ambitious project a few years ago to see how far he could get eating wild.” But Heavey knew next to nothing about gardening or foraging, and he lives in northern Virginia, close to Washington, D.C. The rural wilds, this was not. Is it any surprise that his tasty triumphs were equaled by his hilarious misadventures?

With just the right dose of self-deprecation, Heavey tells the story of his quest, beginning locally and moving out from there. He digs up the ground behind his house and plants an elaborate garden only to be driven to squirrel murder (and a cover-up). He experiences “abundance mania” in the perch run on the Potomac, and again when he spots perfect wild mushrooms in Arlington National Cemetery. He forages for wild watercress, berries, and pawpaws within the beltway, and hunts crayfish in Louisiana and caribou on the Alaskan tundra.

With teachers that include Paula, a grizzled local so popular among DC fishers that she’s been called “the Pablo Escobar of herring,” Hue, a Bronze Star ex-military survival instructor and foraging expert, Michelle, a single mother unselfconsciously devoted to eating local, and Jody, a weathered Cajun fisherman, Bill learns how to catch and cook frogs, prepare cattail pancakes, make salads out of garden weeds and bake a pie with foraged wild cherries. To the delight of his readers and to his young daughter’s despair, Heavey also suffers serious blood loss, humiliation, and meals that are best described as “edible.”

Hunting and Gathering is entertaining and informative, Bill Heavey at his best, and worst.

It's Only Slow Food Until You Try to Eat It: Misadventures of a Suburban Hunter Gatherer Details

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Author : Bill Heavey

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Suburban Hunter Gatherer Bill Heavey

From Reader Review It's Only Slow Food Until You Try to Eat It: Misadventures of a Suburban Hunter Gatherer for online ebook

Michael Rhode says

Bill's an acquaintance of mine, living in the same neighborhood and I bought my copy directly from him. I enjoyed hearing his voice in my head as I read this and recognizing the locales he was in. Parts are very funny indeed, although the underlying message of how hard it is to be self-sufficient truly comes through.

Penelope Allen says

His section on the arctic was especially interesting

Kristi says

Caught without a book - I found this in my son's pile of last year's schoolwork - ripped papers, hall passes, assignments for next year, notes from ?? and this book. His English teacher, Mr. Dukette had given it to him with an inspiring, heart-felt message.

I LOVED this book - It's Only Slow Food Until You Try to Eat It: Misadventures of a Suburban Hunter Gatherer, by Bill Heavey.

I couldn't put it down. I thought I'd put it down when I first read the hunting part, but I bumped over it and moved ahead because Bill Heavey's writing is addictive - worse than Werther's candies. He's really funny and almost ranks with my grandpa for spinning a yarn. He provides recipes, some yummy-sounding, some entertaining, like the monkeyface eel one. He's like a professor, each food adventure steeped in lessons, biology, politics, culinary and geography. I love his quest to check around your local area for edibles, as an alternative to buying every single item from the local grocer. And how he describes what it feels like to be part of nature, walking among the trees, swamps, tundra - scouting out cattails, crawfish, or caribou.

His friends are amazing and colorful and adventurous, like Tom Sawyer may have gathered. The folks he meets while chasing stories are equally rich. I loved this description of meeting a Louisiana family. "I was immediately hit by a wave of hospitality unlike anything I'd ever experienced, one that rendered all resistance futile. I'm not inexperienced in southern hospitality. I was born in Birmingham into an old southern family. This, though, was hospitality of a different magnitude, as if it came from a different place and time. I was immediately plied with food and drink, despite having eaten barbecue on the hour drive from the Lafayette airport. Then, within minutes of meeting me, almost all the people on the boat were offering me the use of their homes whether they were there or not. They told me where they hid their spare keys, and urged me to help myself to anything and. everything I wanted. A couple of men offered to take me duck hunting. Another offered to take me fishing. One offered to do both. These were people I'd known for twenty minutes."

Just a delicious book. Ate it up and have gone searching for more of his books to follow.

Charles Rene says

Reading this book was like taking a delightful romp through the woods with a new friend. Heavey gives you the personal touch by inviting you into his life and inner thoughts as he struggles to learn more about local food sources.

It was cool to learn about the different groups of people in the US that still live mostly off subsistence hunting and gathering and I really enjoyed the unique perspective of a fellow amateur. This book gives a realistic and somewhat comical view of what it is like to try to break into the hunter/forager lifestyle, whether you're looking to become a hobbyist or full-timer.

Sandy D. says

An entertaining memoir about a bumbling hunter, fisher, gardener, and forager who lives near DC. One of the early chapters was sloooow...really, pages about perch? But the pace picked up, the characters became more and more interesting (with some bonus romance!), and the stories - about crawfishing, going crazy ("abundance mania") over mushrooms or sour cherries or paw paws, an expensive foragers' dinner in San Francisco - became funnier and ever more interesting.

In case Bill reads this (I have been shocked by how many authors actually read and comment on my reviews!), I'd like to add that "tart cherries" are a "thing" here in Michigan. Not as common as sweet cherries, but essential and yes delicious for pie.

I was just a smidgeon disappointed that Bill didn't talk about goosefoot (aka lambs quarters or *Chenopodium album*) which is my favorite foraged food, because I have so much in my yard. But truthfully it is a bit boring and I don't eat it (or spinach, mustard greens, purslane, sorrel, or any other greens) nearly as much as I should.

Gia Scott says

Don't expect this to be a guide book of foraging information, but you will find immense humor in the stories he tells. Bill Heavey paints a vivid picture of his journey towards food independence, and it's a brightly colored picture too.

It's a great book for reading in short segments, as the chapters portray separate incidents in his journey to find food. For those who are anti-hunting, you may not like some of the segments, as he exhibits definite carnivorous tendencies as well. It's a great story for anyone who is interested in food independence, foraging, etc. I loved the book and its humor.

Douglas Lord says

Heavey (editor-at-large, *Field and Stream*) tells a tale in which a totally normal dude gets a wild hair up his ass about growing, hunting, and foraging for his own food. The trouble—and the delight—is where he lives; not Idaho or someplace rural, but rather inside Washington D.C.'s Beltway. The result is a hilarious and super instructive book. Heavey learns a lot about how difficult "slow food" is as a lifestyle and why the word edible should not be confused with the term tasty. He plants a garden, fighting savage squirrels who raid it, and forages in vacant lots with his girlfriend. He also has some enviable field trips; frog gigging in Louisiana and smelt netting in San Francisco where he also volunteered at a ForageSF's "Wild Kitchen" event featuring gourmet-prepared foraged foods. There he was handed "...a tray of astonishingly stinky yellow-orange ginkgo fruits. (Imagine a malevolent cheese made from fermented diapers and you're in the olfactory ballpark.) It didn't make my eyes water but was a powerful appetite suppressant." VERDICT Heavey's experience writing for magazines obviously taught him how to master the skill of keeping the reader's attention. His dry hilarity on everything from rototilling to the rarely-seen but abundant monkeyface eel marks, makes this book something special.

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Elaine Selfridge says

I feel like Bill - into food but decidedly not trendy in my foodieness. I want him to come to my farm and walk the woods with me.

Aaron says

Hilarious account of the adventures and stumbles of a freelance wildlife/outdoors writer who decides to eat from nature, starting in his own back yard. He learns the ropes of foraging from a coast-to-coast assortment of interesting characters and shares some great tips and recipes along the way. Recommended for anyone who wants to get back to the land and have a laugh doing it!

Jenn A says

This is a fantastic funny book about the misadventures of a DC suburban single dad who decides to figure out how to live off the land in suburban DC. With the help of some much more capable and knowledgeable guides (most of whom live less than "regular" lives) he learns and eats the fish, meat and fauna that live in this area. He provides some recipes and he pulls no punches regarding both the exhilaration of accomplishing something (finding the right fishing hole for white perch) and the disappointment when you've tried and realized it wasn't that good (cattail pancakes anyone?). I highly recommend this for any weekend hunters as well as gardeners and foragers. I laughed out loud many many times.

Dinah Gross says

Loved it! Looked at food and eating in different and interestingly funny way. The author's exploration into foraging and scavenging informative and insightful! You feel you're on this very personal journey with him and share in the life transformation he experiences.

Caroline says

Bill Heavey, a contributor to a fishing magazine, no stranger to hunting and fishing decides to see if he can live more self-sufficiently. He meets with and gets to know people who teach him secrets of fishing for perch, herring, picking what he'd previously considered weeds growing at the side of the road, tilling his land for a vegetable garden, picking wild mushrooms at the National Arlington Cemetery, catching and foraging for cattails, sometimes to the despair of his young daughter, Emma. He starts local, keeping his hunting and fishing around the Washington DC area, but later moves further to Alaska to hunt caribou and Louisiana to catch crayfish.

His project is not without bloody mishap such as when he commits squirrel murder with his crossbow and has to hide the evidence, or when he mistakenly picks thorny weeds, slashing his own hand and getting covered in blood and mud before picking his daughter up from dance class. Amidst the humor, he brings to our consciousness that with consumerism, many people no longer have to eat seasonally. We now have the luxury of fruits and vegetables flown in from various countries year round, farmed fish and animals fed with vitamins and growth hormones so their breeders can get them to the market and our tables faster and in the process, we lose the true flavor of natural food.

It's interesting, it's funny and it is a window into the world of the few people who live off the land and sea.

Laura says

Note: in this review, I'm calling my friend, Bill's "love interest" both to avoid any spoilers and to protect their privacy.

I read this book almost three years ago and I'm embarrassed that I haven't managed to review it until now. Bill Heavey is a great writer, funny and compelling. I'm sure I would have enjoyed it regardless but I also have met Bill a few times and know his love interest (as you learn more about in the book) a bit better. For example, there's a weed walk in the book where a really well-known forager meets Bill's love interest - I was there too! He (the "famous" forager, not Bill) told me not to eat a particular plant if I was pregnant because the Native Americans used it to cause abortions. I had the fun of oh so happily sharing the news that I was indeed pregnant (early in my second trimester, with Ellie) and definitely would not be eating that plant! I've also been part of the Baltimore Foodmakers for a long time, a group he references a few times and even know the guy of the deer heart at the end! You should definitely read this book - especially if you're at all interested in urban food foraging but read it even if you're not.

Emily says

I had a really fun time reading this book. it was informative, down to earth, and very funny. Heavey is a very likeable guy and that shines through his self-deprecating narration about subjects that can be heavy at times.

Michael says

Other books I've read by this author have all been a compilation of articles written for Field and Stream. This book was different in that it was written as a stand alone book, with an overarching theme throughout. Also being written as a book, rather than individual articles for a national publication freed the author up to the use of some profanity that I had not found in his other books. I thought this was unnecessary and detracted from his writing. Still the tone and style are the same as previous books, which I find enjoyable minus the profanity. Patrick McManus described his writing as acerbic on the cover of one of his other books. I had to look up the word to know what it meant. But I now believe acerbic is the perfect word to describe the author's writing.
