

Courage, Resilience, and the American Dream

The weeds needed pulling. Branches needed trimming. Dishes and silverware had piled up on the sink board. Books, papers, and crayons—the grandchildren were visiting—littered the dining room table and needed to be stowed away before supper.

Yet there I sat on the front porch, drinking a Diet Coke, mesmerized by Rose Wilder Lane's [*Let the Hurricane Roar*](#), a title taken from the line of a hymn. I'd bought this book for a quarter from the children's cart outside of our public library's tiny used bookstore, knowing that the author was the daughter of famed author Laura Ingalls Wilder, and on a whim, snatched it up as I headed to the porch to take a break from work and housecleaning.

Though I intended only a glance at the book, the first few pages of this story about life on the prairie 150 years ago hooked me heart and mind. I finished this 153-page novel before dusk and found it not only a fast read, but a book that might instruct and inspire us all in our present troubles.

Right off the bat, teenagers Caroline and Charles marry and then head west to stake their claim on land which, if they work it for five years, will belong to them free and clear. They wind up settling into a dugout cabin near a sparkling creek with some ground already broken for planting, as this was a claim left by a previous settler who'd found the desolate life too tough.

For months, life for these newlyweds is good. Caroline turns the dugout into a home and bears a baby boy on her 17th birthday. Charles looks proudly at the field of glistening wheat, and confident of a bright future, heads for town, where he buys lumber, equipment, and presents for Caroline on

credit.

Then an immense black cloud of whirring grasshoppers descends from the sky, devastating the wheat and the young couple's dreams.

Other catastrophes soon send Charles back East for work, where he breaks his leg in an accident, leaving Caroline on her own, facing blizzards, wolves, and possible claim jumpers. Through the eyes of this young mother, hardly more than a child herself, we experience the terrors and dangers these pioneers daily faced on the plains.

If Caroline were living today, she'd likely be sitting in an 11th-grade classroom, returning home to food on the table and a warm, well-lit house, however humble. Here on the plains, however, plagued by snowstorms and howling wolves, Caroline twists hay into bundles for burning, cares for her baby, and makes do with a meager supply of food.

Near the end of her ordeal, Caroline undergoes an epiphany: her trials have left her stronger than her adversaries. "The howling of the blizzard did not disturb Caroline; she felt the braggart joy of Samson, hugging in secret his triumph. 'A lion stood in the way; but out of the eater I have taken meat; out of the strong I have taken sweetness.'"

One foundation stone for her newfound confidence is Caroline's American sense of independence. When Mr. Svenson, a Swedish immigrant and neighbor who has decided to give up his claim, complains about the country Caroline replies, "The country's all right, Mr. Svenson. No country's going to feed you with a spoon."

Though her mother's *Little House* literary fame far surpassed her own achievements, Rose Wilder Lane was in her day a published author, a highly respected journalist, and a passionate [advocate](#) of individualism and liberty. A socialist

in her early adulthood, she came to despise both communism and fascism, and was an unabashed critic of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies, denouncing, for example, social security as a "Ponzi scheme." Several of her non-fiction books, including [Give Me Liberty](#) and [The Discovery of Freedom](#), remain available.

Lane also firmly believed in the American Dream. Despite all their setbacks, Caroline and Charles retain their vision of a better future. In the last line of the novel, Caroline looks at little Charles John and thinks, "If he remembered at all this life in the dugout, he would think of it only as a brief prelude to more spacious times."

Right now, we're going through our own version of life in a dugout. The grasshoppers this time aren't insects dropping from the sky, but are the politicians, regulators, and bureaucrats of our governments. Like Caroline, let us hope and pray that the disasters wrought by this swarm of predators are also but a brief prelude to more spacious times.

(Note: The title of *Let the Hurricane Roar* was later changed to *Young Pioneers*. The names Caroline and Charles, taken from Lane's maternal grandparents, were dropped in favor of Molly and David.)

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