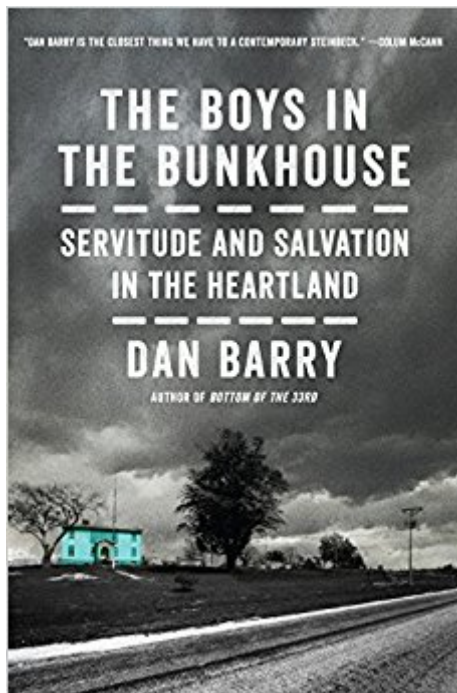




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# The Boys In The Bunkhouse: Servitude And Salvation In The Heartland



## Synopsis

Nominated for the 2017 Hillman Prize and the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award  
With this Dickensian tale from America's heartland, New York Times writer and columnist Dan Barry tells the harrowing yet uplifting story of the exploitation and abuse of a resilient group of men with intellectual disability, and the heroic efforts of those who helped them to find justice and reclaim their lives. In the tiny Iowa farm town of Atalissa, dozens of men, all with intellectual disability and all from Texas, lived in an old schoolhouse. Before dawn each morning, they were bussed to a nearby processing plant, where they eviscerated turkeys in return for food, lodging, and \$65 a month. They lived in near servitude for more than thirty years, enduring increasing neglect, exploitation, and physical and emotional abuse until state social workers, local journalists, and one tenacious labor lawyer helped these men achieve freedom. Drawing on exhaustive interviews, Dan Barry dives deeply into the lives of the men, recording their memories of suffering, loneliness and fleeting joy, as well as the undying hope they maintained despite their traumatic circumstances. Barry explores how a small Iowa town remained oblivious to the plight of these men, analyzes the many causes for such profound and chronic negligence, and lays out the impact of the men's dramatic court case, which has spurred advocates including President Obama to push for just pay and improved working conditions for people living with disabilities. A luminous work of social justice, told with compassion and compelling detail, *The Boys in the Bunkhouse* is more than just inspired storytelling. It is a clarion call for a vigilance that ensures inclusion and dignity for all.

## Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial; Reprint edition (May 2, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062372149

ISBN-13: 978-0062372147

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 93 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #116,813 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #73 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Disabled #341 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Relationships > Abuse #1273 in Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources

## Customer Reviews

“Gently, emphatically, and indelibly, Barry conveys a tale of unthinkable brutality. (Kirkus Reviews (starred review)) “Barry’s book can’t right all those wrongs, but it at least documents them eloquently, and in a more permanent way. (Kansas City Star) “An extraordinary contribution to the literature of social injustice. . . . The Boys in the Bunkhouse surely will emerge as one of the landmark books of the year. (Providence Journal) “The Boys in the Bunkhouse is not just a book about the victims but also a book that turns those victims into real men. Dan Barry has written them into history, as only a journalist could. (Newsweek) “An important story about the horrors of slavery and exploitation that can happen to vulnerable people anywhere. (The Atlantic) “Disturbing yet beautifully told... (America Magazine) The story of these men gets the full telling it deserves in Dan Barry’s powerful, moving, and at times heartbreaking book, The Boys in the Bunkhouse. (Commonweal Magazine) “Dan Barry gives dignity even to the darkest corners of the American experience. He is the closest thing we have to a contemporary Steinbeck. (Colum McCann, author of the National Book Award-winning Let the Great World Spin) “Dan Barry represents the magic that is possible in journalism when there is a convergence between a great story and great talent. (Gay Talese) “Hard-hitting journalism shot through with flourishes of the best literary nonfiction. . . . The Boys in the Bunkhouse is, ultimately, a hopeful story of the power of a few dogged individuals to make change. (Minneapolis Star Tribune) “As an exposé of a moral catastrophe, this is a vital piece of reportage. (New York Times Book Review) Praise for Bottom of the 33rd: “What a book—an exquisite exercise in story-telling, democracy and myth-making that has, at its center, a great respect for the symphony of voices that make up America. (Colum McCann) “A fascinating, beautifully told story... In the hands of Barry, a national correspondent for the New York Times, this marathon of duty, loyalty, misery and folly becomes a riveting narrative... The book feels like *Our Town* on the diamond. (Minneapolis Star Tribune)

It is an ultimately uplifting tale from the heartland: a group of men with intellectual disability, all from Texas, living in a tired old schoolhouse in the tiny Iowa farm town of Atalissa. Every morning before dawn, they report to a nearby processing plant to eviscerate turkeys. In return, they receive food, lodging, and sixty-five dollars a month. For decades. The people of Atalissa accept and befriend the men—known as “the boys”—but fail to notice the signs of

neglect, exploitation, and physical and emotional abuse. It isn't until a cadre of heroes—conscientious social workers, a local journalist, and one tenacious government lawyer—come to their rescue that the men receive a joyous and just coda to their lives. Drawing on extensive personal interviews and reams of public records, New York Times journalist Dan Barry delves deep into the lives of these extraordinary men, summoning their memories and suffering, their tender moments of joy, their persistent hopefulness—and, most of all, their endurance.

Many parts of this book will make you cry. You will feel sadness for the boys, regret for the treatment of the disabled, and anger over the ineptitude of the government. By the end of this book, I had a new sense of how important close friendships and community ties are. If only people in the town had thought to visit inside the bunkhouse or ask the boys how things were going at work. I think this is one of the most compelling books I have ever read.

I can not believe it took so long for these men to get help. All the money in the world will not give back the life's that they lost. I also think that jail time should of been served from a lot of these individuals who committed these abuses on these poor souls. Shame on those companies and their families including Kraft!! I recommend this book. It will leave you speechless.

It's hard to believe when reading this book that the events described here happened not long ago, in fact, partly in the 21st century. How could it be that these men, with varying degrees of intellectual disability, were made to work almost as slaves and to live in increasingly squalid conditions for over 30 years? The author, Dan Barry, answers that question by writing a balanced and well-researched book. He doesn't paint anyone (except maybe the last set of overseers of the men) as pure evil. Rather, well-meaning people with a bit too much of an eye on profits but with a sincere caring for the "boys" created a situation which gradually became worse and worse, as the boys became more isolated and older and the town that they lived in didn't see what was happening. I am glad that most of them have now what is the closest they will probably get to a happy ending to their lives. This book affected me personally. I have a disabled daughter, one who would never even be able to hold a job and live as slightly as independent a life as these men did. The country's treatment of the disabled is not something I look at in a detached way, but rather, with personal interest and much fear. I won't be around forever to care for my daughter, and I hope that people like those who rescued the men in the end will be watching over her, keeping her happy and cared

for. I cried many times in this reading at the dignity of these men, even under horrible condition, and how much I hope that books like this will make people aware of the huge need to provide a decent life to all.

It took me several days to finish this book , only because it was so disturbing. I don't know why I was shocked that this abuse & neglect happened, in fact it probably still happens. It is sad and a real eyeopener. I would have given it 5 stars but it rather poorly written ,although we'll investigated

Personally knowing the people in this book, it is spot on and very accurate. Would recommend to anyone

Great record of these mentally challenged men and their lifetime of abuse. Knowing the Texas area and since my mom worked for the Abilene State School in the 80s, I was drawn to this story of men from that area.

Dan Barry's narrative exposes a tragic miscarriage of justice and human rights regarding the developmentally disabled adults he chronicles. While the book takes its reader carefully and methodically through the various archeological layers of the story that detail the legal, social, communal, familial omissions that doomed these men to a sub-human existence, he does it with an eye to the details of time and place that would do justice to any of the romantic poets. Barry would cringe to have the word "romantic" associated with his prose but his ability to stop your heart and breath with a phrase that is exquisitely crafted must be recognized by some sort of superlative. Perhaps it is the Celtic charism for the use of language as a source of enchantment that runs in his veins. Five stars? Barely enough! Margaret Carney President Emerita/St. Bonaventure University

I liked the content, the history, the facts. I especially liked how the author helped us get to know the individuals and care for them. What I didn't care for and skipped over was the lengthy history of persons who were not the main characters. I didn't need all the backgrounds of so many of the "helpers" who saved these guys. I didn't need to spend time learning about each place, of many of the people involved do what I did, skip it. The story's a good one and important to know.

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