Hope Jahren's Lab Girl interweaves the stories of plants’ growth and beauty with her own coming-of-age as a woman in the STEM field. Jahren’s memoir is split into three parts – ‘Roots & Leaves,’ ‘Wood & Knots,’ and ‘Flowers & Fruit’ – with each section tying closely together the stage of her life as a budding research scientist.

Jahren’s roots begin in rural Minnesota, where winter lasts the majority of the year and children grow up fated to work in the slaughterhouse their parents, grandparents, and great-great-grandparents have all worked as well. Her father was a science professor at the local community college and her mother was an English graduate and though affectionate was few and far between in their household. Jahren shows how her parents influenced the passion and precision she brought with her to science at an early age. Her book starts with memories of playing in her father’s lab, long before she even knew biology as a school subject. She managed what many others could not and left her hometown for the University of Minnesota, where she worked long nights in a hospital pharmacy under the tutelage of a chain-smoking, long-time employee named Lydia, prepping bags of intravenous medications while mulling over the works of authors like Charles Dickens.

Jahren’s dedication and clear adoration for ecology, coupled with her success, continue to be an inspiration for many, from amateurs to professionals. Once Jahren describes the first time she felt like a true scientist – after discovering the seed of the hackberry tree is made of opal – she writes, “I was the only person in an infinite exploding universe where dreams are fulfilled and the realization of personal importance is achieved, are present throughout her entire work and they make this memoir an important read for anyone working towards a dream – even if it is no bigger than a seemingly insignificant seed.

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References


