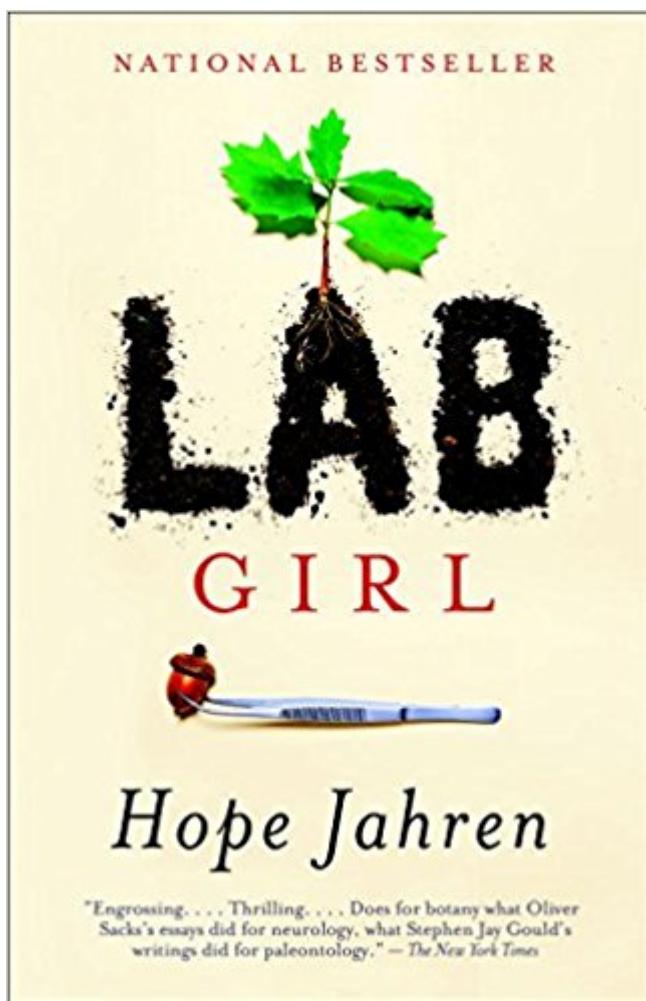


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Lab Girl



Synopsis

National Bestseller
Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography
A New York Times Notable Book
Winner of the American Association for the Advancement of Science/Subaru Science Books & Film Prize for Excellence in Science Books
Finalist for the PEN/E.O. Wilson Literary Science Writing Award
One of the Best Books of the Year: The Washington Post, TIME.com, NPR, Slate, Entertainment Weekly, Newsday, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Kirkus Reviews
Geobiologist Hope Jahren has spent her life studying trees, flowers, seeds, and soil. *Lab Girl* is her revelatory treatise on plant life—but it is also a celebration of the lifelong curiosity, humility, and passion that drive every scientist. In these pages, Hope takes us back to her Minnesota childhood, where she spent hours in unfettered play in her father's college laboratory. She tells us how she found a sanctuary in science, learning to perform lab work “with both the heart and the hands.” She introduces us to Bill, her brilliant, eccentric lab manager. And she extends the mantle of scientist to each one of her readers, inviting us to join her in observing and protecting our environment. Warm, luminous, compulsively readable, *Lab Girl* vividly demonstrates the mountains that we can move when love and work come together.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (February 28, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1101873728

ISBN-13: 978-1101873724

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 1,124 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,529 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Mental Health > Bipolar #5 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Plants #10 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Environmental Science

Customer Reviews

An Best Book of April 2016: I was doubtful that I would like this book. While I appreciate a beautiful flower as much as the next city-girl, the thought of reading a whole book about a geobiologist-- a scientist who spends her life studying plants, trees, soils as well as flowers--made me want to run to

the nearest dysfunctional family memoir about crazy parents and their wounded children. But Hope Jahren won me over very quickly. Somehow she knows me: “the average person [who] cannot imagine himself staring at dirt for longer than the twenty seconds needed to pick up whatever object he just dropped. And she doesn’t judge. Instead, she just tells her story, which, it turns out has a lot to do with plants and science, of course--her father was a scientist, she basically grew up in a lab, and taking long walks through nature was the way she communed with her reticent Scandinavian American parents--but also has a lot to do with other things. Like life, for instance, and friendship and passion and love, for ideas, for work and for all living beings, including--shocker!--people. Surely many readers will feel as I did that the story of her relationship with Bill, her physically and emotionally damaged lab partner, is at the heart of this wonderful story; it’s unusual, it’s inspiring and it doesn’t fit neatly into the little window box we think we’re supposed to favor. And if Jahren can surprise you about all that messy human stuff, just think how she can change your feelings about dirt. --Sara Nelson --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

“Engrossing. . . . Thrilling. . . . Does for botany what Oliver Sacks’s essays did for neurology, what Stephen Jay Gould’s writings did for paleontology.” • “The New York Times” “Lab Girl” made me look at trees differently. It compelled me to ponder the astonishing grace and gumption of a seed. Perhaps most importantly, it introduced me to a deeply inspiring woman • a scientist so passionate about her work I felt myself vividly with her on every page. This is a smart, enthralling, and winning debut.” • “Cheryl Strayed” “Brilliant. . . . Extraordinary. . . . Delightfully, wickedly funny. . . . Powerful and disarming.” • “The Washington Post” “Clear, compelling and uncompromisingly honest . . . Hope Jahren is the voice that science has been waiting for.” • “Nature” “Spirited. . . . Stunning. . . . Moving.” • “The New York Times Book Review” “A powerful new memoir . . . Jahren is a remarkable scientist who turns out to be a remarkable writer as well. . . . Think Stephen Jay Gould or Oliver Sacks. But Hope Jahren is a woman in science, who speaks plainly to just how rugged that can be. And to the incredible machinery of life around us.” • “On Point/NPR” “Lyrical . . . illuminating . . . Offers a lively glimpse into a scientifically inclined mind.” • “The Wall Street Journal” “Some people are great writers, while other people live lives of adventure and importance. Almost no one does both. Hope Jahren does both. She makes me wish I’d been a scientist.” • Ann Patchett, author of *State of Wonder*

“Lab Girl” surprised, delighted, and moved me. I was drawn in from the start by the clarity and beauty of Jahren’s prose. . . . With Lab Girl, Jahren joins those talented scientists who are able to reveal to us the miracle of this world in which we live.

•Abraham Verghese, author of Cutting for Stone “Revelatory. . . . A veritable jungle of ideas and sensations.

•Slate “Warm, witty . . . Fascinating. . . .

Jahren’s singular gift is her ability to convey the everyday wonder of her work: exploring the strange, beautiful universe of living things that endure and evolve and bloom all around us, if we bother to look.

•Entertainment Weekly “Deeply affecting. . . . A totally original work, both fierce and uplifting. . . . A belletrist in the mold of Oliver Sacks, she is terrific at showing just how science is done. . . . She’s an acute observer, prickly, and funny as hell.

•Elle “Magnificent. . . . [A] gorgeous book of life. . . . Jahren contains multitudes. Her book is love as life. Trees as truth.

•Chicago Tribune “Mesmerizing. . . . Deft and flecked with humor . . . a scientist’s memoir of a quirky, gritty, fascinating life. . . . Like Robert Sapolsky’s A Primate’s Memoir or Helen Macdonald’s H is for Hawk, it delivers the zing of a beautiful mind in nature.

•Seattle Times “Jahren’s memoir [is] the beginning of a career along the lines of Annie Dillard or Diane Ackerman.

•Minneapolis Star Tribune “A scientific memoir that’s beautifully human.

•Popular Science “Breathtakingly honest. . . . Gorgeous. . . . At its core, Lab Girl is a book about seeing with the eyes, but also the hands and the heart.

•American Scientist

Jahren is a beautiful writer. Her chapters on soil and trees and plants were gripping and eye opening--even for this scientist reader. Yet this book, which might better be considered a platonic love story to Bill, her long time lab partner, rather than a book about the life of a scientist, was tainted by the gleeful disdain that Jahren and Bill show for many other people. I would give the book five stars if she’d just stuck to the plants and Bill. At one point Jahren compares the intelligence of her graduate students to her dog-- and the dog wins. She refers to another quiet student on a trip as "warm-blooded cargo," because of his uselessness as a driver. What really sealed the deal for me was the road trip. 5 Days before a conference, Jahren and Bill decide they want to attend. They decide to drive cross country, taking two graduate students with them to share in the driving (not to enrich their education or anything). One day, Jahren does not heed multiple warnings and directs the graduate student driver to go straight into a snow storm. Predictably, the van flips when they hit some ice. Lessons Jahren learned: 1) When you pee into bottles make sure to cap them. 2) Wear a

seat belt. The student driver, understandably shaken, asks to be dropped off at the airport so she can fly home, but Jahren and Bill yell at her and refuse, calling her a quitter. They drag her to the conference in the banged up van so that Jahren can deliver the talk that was so important that it was never mentioned again in the book. When they return, Jahren nobly claims responsibility for the busted university van (as she should-- she was in charge!). How selfless. Jahren and Bill enjoy giving their students a repetitive, meaningless task, like labeling hundreds of bottles, and then telling them that, sorry, they won't be using their work after all. To pass their sadistic test a student must both resign his or herself to the monotony that is science and accept that the work was wasted, but also salvage something from the time spent. A memorable student saved all the bottle caps, hoping they could be "spares" in the future. There are little stories like this woven into the book, souring the beautiful language on scientific discovery and personal passion. I was a graduate student once and this culture is pervasive and horrifying and drives good students from pursuing science. A student may have the passion, but s/he just can't contend with being treated like the scum on Jahren's shoes. I admire Jahren's scientific successes and her obvious dedication, but it is overshadowed by her perpetuation of a problematic culture.

I was sucked into this memoir probably because I'm about the same age, from roughly the same places in Dr. Jahren's life and I'm also a scientist. However, it also helped that she has a very engaging writing style with all the personal details that makes me wonder how the *heck* she remembered every tiny detail. This is not a simple "I was born, grew up and lived" story. It reads like a novel, with plot twists, heroes, villains and a relatively happy ending. I appreciate the way she incorporated her struggles with mental illness, women in science and university funding (which will make any tuition paying parent give a HARD look at the college they are paying to educate their child at) within the book but never came off as whiny or complaining. Simply this is "the way it is". She is also deeply personal with her own thoughts on her childhood, the self doubts we all have in our twenties and eventually parenthood. It was an entertaining, informative and inspiring read. Sometimes we don't know if we're making the right decisions, but if we made them, they are at least ours.

This is a fascinating memoir of the ups and downs of the shared lives of two professional scientists; one a professor and the other her assistant. These two share a love for their work and a professionalism that doesn't have room for a pecking order. Their "the glass is always half full" philosophy makes for contagious humor and mutual respect that one cannot help but admire and as

a reader enjoy.

This book is juxtaposition between a compelling memoir of a female scientist and a lucid account of plants and life. Even though this story orbits around science, you don't have to be hesitant about diving in it because of that. The author, Hope Jahren is eloquent at depicting vividly her childhood in her father's lab and her long journey in her own lab. Being a real scientist in pure research as a woman seems to be long demanding Odyssey but worthwhile. Especially I love her name, Hope. She never gives up her hope under any circumstances like her name. Her incessant passion toward biology would come across some obstacles on the way such as funding, unexpected accidents, but she always overcomes accompanied by her coworker Bill. Hope against hope. I'm still curious about what's with her fraternal twin, Bill(not literally), how it's going with Jahren's lab in Hawaii. But I know that some uncertainty becomes the beauty of life at times.

Absolutely brilliant writing about the life of a woman academic in a field dominated by men, and her growth to become the world class scientist she is today. The vignettes depicting the academic life are so true, and they sadly have not changed from the decade or two since Dr. Jahren experienced them. Don't get me wrong, there are many laugh out loud moments in the book, and the overall outcome gives hope (pun intended) to young women in STEM, but it is a very realistic depiction of academic life for a woman in STEM. I found the snippets of information about plants scattered throughout the book to be illuminating, even though physics is my science of choice. I highly recommend this book especially to any woman considering or entering an engineering or science field.

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