

Book Review

Elizabeth Joan Farmwald. *A Bridge Between Two Worlds: My Journey to be Amish*. Sugarcreek, OH: Carlisle Printing, 2023. 225 pp.

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Elizabeth Joan (Joanie) Farmwald sets out to tell the story of her otherworldly journey to be Amish. While it takes only an hour to drive from Cleveland, Ohio, to Middlefield, Ohio, her journey is from urban to rural, from Catholic to Amish, from dependence upon stores for household goods and food to self-sufficiency as gardeners and farmers who eat the food they grow in all seasons of the year, and from reliance upon city utilities to living off the grid. In other words, Farmwald is correct to imagine this journey as one between two worlds.

What is unusual about this memoir is the direction Farmwald takes. For many decades, Amish young people in Geauga County, Ohio, have been lured to the city, traveling by bus from Middlefield to Cleveland; however, in this story, a Cleveland young person travels by car to a Middlefield bar where young Amish men congregate to play pool, enjoy alcohol, and become acquainted with non-Amish young women.

After the first chapter, which takes place after Joanie and Jonas are married, the author includes eight chapters that detail her growing-up years, her family life, and her religious and educational training. Chapter 10 ends when Joanie and Jonas meet, and chapters 11 through 21 introduce us to their lives as a couple in love and their first year as a married couple. Chapter 22 fast forwards readers to their life as a family with three children, and in the next three chapters, we follow the growing family as Jonas becomes a minister, they move to another state, and they have eight children. In other words, readers will not find much prose about the couple's romance.

The author engages in a show-and-tell method that primarily tells us about their Amish family life, as she uses declarative sentences to reveal what she finds valuable in Amish beliefs. Rather than reflecting upon her life and contemplating how she has transformed herself to become an Amish woman, she uses didactic prose to tell readers about the higher values of Amish life.

At the end of the book, Farmwald includes a chapter of letters by her children, written at her request, that recount their memories of growing up in Joanie and Jonas's home. Here, readers learn that one of the couple's daughters did not remain Amish, taking her mother's journey in reverse. Readers will be left wondering how Joanie and Jonas processed this event and life beyond with



Jonas an Amish minister and Joanie deeply invested in Amish values. Farmwald does not mention any impact this daughter's decision had upon their family.

On a few occasions, the author points to historical migrations, sweeping movements of people through the years that brought her Amish community to its present circumstances. These descriptions cover hundreds of years in brief paragraphs that unsatisfactorily explain the social milieu in which the author found herself.

Readers will not be surprised to learn that Joanie and Jonas have lived fascinating lives. Unfortunately, they will learn the *what* but not the *how*. By the end of the book, readers will have gained little knowledge about how the Farmwalds' chosen lives transformed their lived experiences and how they grew into maturity and older age in a close-knit Amish community.