

Easy Going

LEON HALE  
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出版者:Texas A & M Univ Pr

出版时间:2000-1

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780940672109

This delightful collection of Leon Hale columns from the old Houston Post introduces us to a fascinating assemblage of Texana, from memorable individuals to a quickly vanishing rural lifestyle in which joy can be found in the commonplace, if only one knows where to look. And Hale does. Looking and listening are his forte as he takes a relaxed ramble through the back roads of central Texas, across the Gulf Coast Prairie, and into the Piney Woods and Lower Rio Grande Valley. Everywhere he goes he finds uncommon ordinary folk: a bridge-burning sheriff, a country blacksmith still plying his trade, hardworking illegal aliens, a young man dying with quiet grace. Hale's approach to all he encounters is easy going, unpretentious, open to surprises. This allows him to rejoice in simple pleasures: good food at a generous table; the natural beauty of fields and forests; small domestic joys that so many of us take for granted -- such as picture taking at a family picnic, the happy company of a talkative baby, the "fierce" celebration of a sixtieth birthday, or a day that is special and luminous for no definable reason. Renewing acquaintance with these classic columns originally compiled in 1983 demonstrates most vividly the ambiguity of time's passage. Even as the stories recount in many respects a lifestyle that no longer exists, they astonish with the freshness of their telling and show the vividness and individuality this vanished lifestyle allowed. Here are stories about his mischievous Cousin C. T.; Peerless Ellisor, whose summary of wisdom after eighty-four years is that "a man must have love in his heart: " Sam Dement, who sells magazines door to door in a rural area, just as Hale's father did during the Depression; and John Rotan, who left a nursing home to live alone in a tin shack deep in the woods he loves. There are also tales of remarkable occurrences, such as his father's experience with a grateful panther; or when fifty birds discovered the delights of ice-skating; or when Uncle Rhodie's hitchiking bear took over driving duties. Among many other things. Hale muses upon the timelessness of sandlot baseball, the reasons why people fish, memories of a first kiss, and the endurance of old time expressions such as "getting easy", and "back-reaching". And most of all, in this splendid collection, he reminds us of the richness of our state and its people as depicted by a person whose ability to see through stereotypes to the heart of things has yet to be equaled.

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