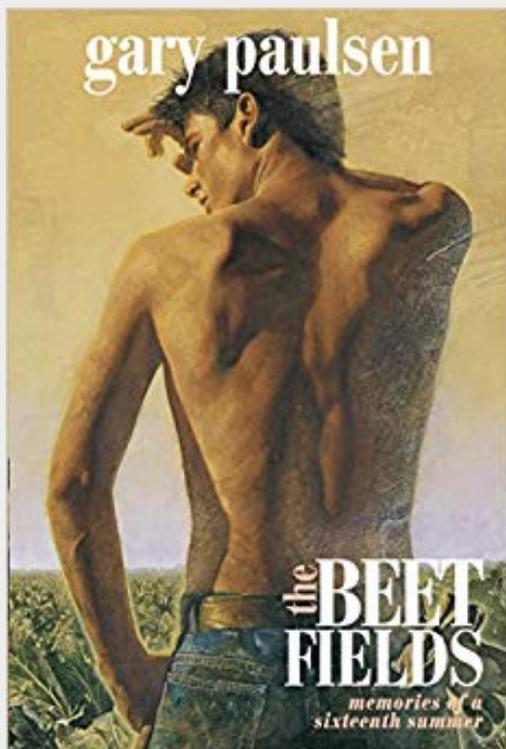


The Beet Fields by Gary Paulsen



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Author: Gary Paulsen

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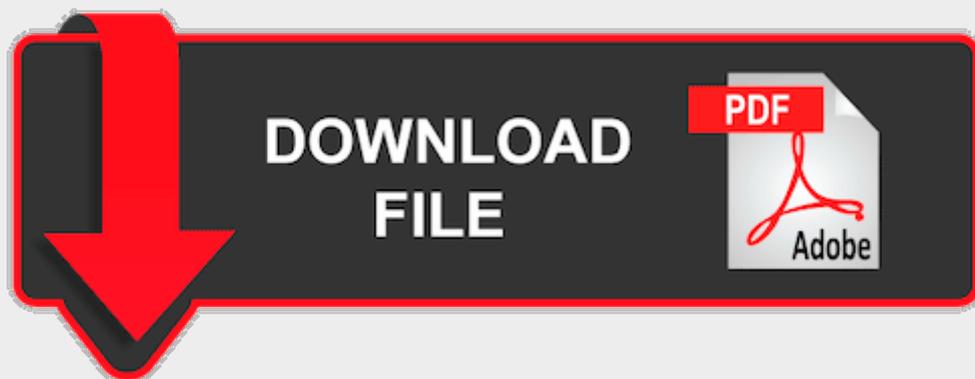
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For a 16-year-old boy out in the world alone for the first time, every day's an education in the hard work and boredom of migrant labor; every day teaches him something more about friendship, or hunger, or profanity, or lust--always lust. He learns how a poker game, or hitching a ride, can turn deadly. He discovers the secret sadness and generosity to be found on a lonely farm in the middle of nowhere. Then he joins up with a carnival and becomes a grunt, running a ride and shilling for the geek show. He's living the hard carny life and beginning to see the world through carny eyes. He's tough. Cynical. By the end of the summer he's pretty sure he knows it all. Until he meets Ruby. *From the Hardcover edition.*



Reviews of the **The Beet Fields** by Gary Paulsen



1. Armin

A great coming of age story by Gary Paulsen

2. Risteacor

My daughter had to read for school book club - not her favorite book.
Good for boys.

3. digytal soul

This was a great book. And I will read it again. And I will also tell my
parents to read this book.

4. Gralinda

This is a great book one of my favorites!! Also a classic by Gary paulsen
and he never fails to impress with his work

5. Pringles

Gary Paulsen's "pseudo-memoir," THE BEET FIELDS: MEMORIES OF A

SIXTEENTH SUMMER, is, by his own admission, an attempt to render an honest look at a small piece of his own life. He writes, in an Author's Note, that he has often used parts of his life in other books, "in softer forms," then continues -

"But here it is now, as real as I can write it, and as real as I can remember it happening."

And it does seem pretty damn real - at times even raw - as he tells how he ran away, the summer he turned sixteen, from a home with abusive, alcoholic parents. The central character - presumably the author himself - is unnamed, called only "the boy."

"He was only half awake, fighting sleep, half dreaming, half knowing. His mother was there beside him. She had come to his bed many times drunk, to sleep with him ... But tonight, even half dreaming, he knew something was different, wrong, about her need for him, and he rolled and pushed and stood away in lonely horror, while she lay there moaning ... And he ran ..."

Such a suggestive and shocking introduction immediately brought to mind Earl Thompson's classic and notorious autobiographical novel, A GARDEN OF SAND. And because the protagonist is known only as "the boy," I thought too of Tony Earley's sweetly innocent Depression era novel, JIM THE BOY. But there is more of Thompson's gritty feel to Paulsen's story than there is of Earley's innocence.

Because THE BEET FIELDS is, more than anything, a coming-of-age story, which follows the boy through his various adventures across the flatness of North Dakota, working with Mexican migrants hoeing beets, followed by more dawn-to-dusk labor on a farm, an escape from an unscrupulous deputy sheriff, a harrowing night ride west with a Hungarian immigrant, a short stay with a lonely widow on a barren farm and, finally, a stint as a "carny," with a traveling carnival, where he meets the beautiful and exotic Ruby, who is, to the boy, "simply, everything."

There were things in this book that took me back to my own adolescence, even down to midway burlesque shows in traveling carnivals, something I experienced my fifteenth summer. Even the back-breaking labor of hoeing, the farm work, and the mind-numbing fatigue that follows all felt familiar. Paulsen succeeded in his aim. He made it "real."

At Barely 150 pages, THE BEET FIELDS is a quick read, but its essence will linger. It's a powerful little book about growing up. It may be aimed at a young adult audience, but it will resonate equally with adults. Very highly recommended.

6. Steamy Ibis

Welcome to the school of hard knocks, Gary Paulsen style. Driven from home by the sexual advances of a drunken mother, a teenage boy closes the door on life as he knows it when he runs off in the dark of night. The 16-year-old boy, who goes the length of the novel unnamed, soon finds a job thinning beets in the fields of North Dakota with a group of migrant workers from Mexico. The boy is given little shelter, little food, and the labor is backbreaking; and the fees charged by the farmer for food (dry peanut butter sandwiches doled out by the farmer's crab of a wife) and the use of a hoe eat up what little he earns.

Before long, one of the Mexican men takes the boy under his wing and invites him to partake of their tortillas and beans. The boy marvels at the Mexicans' easy camaraderie and ability to transcend their intensive labor. Through them, he learns that good food, friendship, and a little music go a long way in easing the rigors of life.

When he's offered a permanent summer job on a nearby farm, the boy accepts after seeing the farmer's lovely daughter. Although he never gets a chance to speak to her, he dutifully plows the fields and does what is required of him without comment. The boy avoids town while accumulating quite a bit of money for his work, aware that the law may be looking for him because he is a runaway. A corrupt sheriff's deputy eventually rounds him up and steals his hard-earned cash, but leaves him unattended in an unlocked cell. Spurred on by his fellow inmate, a drunken old man, the boy walks out of jail without looking back.

Before his 16th summer is over, the boy has witnessed a fluke death, worked as a farmhand and substitute son for a widowed woman, learned the "carny" (carnival) trade and been initiated into the wonders of sex. What more could a teenage boy ask for?

Modeled on Paulsen's own life, *THE BEET FIELDS* is as simple and straightforward as you can get. Although certain readers might be sensitive to the novel's sexual content, this optimistic and honest coming-of-age story is sure to please Paulsen's posse of ardent fans.

--- Reviewed by Tammy L. Currier

7. Balladobine

The book *The Beet Fields* is about Gary Paulsen's teenage years. Paulsen is famous for the books that he writes and for running the Iditarod, a 1200-mile race for Iditarod Alaska to Nome. His accomplishments in *The Beet Fields* are that he runs away from home at sixteen, works the fields with immigrants, and learns to support himself. The book focuses on people helping other people because they want to, not because they have to. The parts that seemed glossed over were why he left home, where his father was, and that the book just ends.

The book was easy to read and understand. Information is well organized and in order. The strongest aspect of the book was that a sixteen-year-old boy ran away from home and supported himself by doing odd jobs. The ending and beginning need to be improved because the end just ends and the beginning does not give you any background.

I gave four stars to the book because it is an incredible book, and has a lot of details. I would recommend the book to people who enjoy adventure, and suspense, because it takes you all over South Dakota. Paulsen is trying to tell us that there is more to people than we think, and that we should get to know people before we put them down. I think it is an important message because I get to know people first, like he does in his books. Paulsen passes his message successfully through his books.

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