



Methland: The Death and Life of an American Small Town

By Nick Reding

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The bestselling book that launched meth back into the nation's consciousness. Based on Reding's four years of reporting in the agricultural town of Oelwein, Iowa, and tracing the connections to the global forces that set the stage for the meth epidemic, *Methland* offers a vital perspective on a contemporary tragedy. It is a portrait of a community under siege, of the lives that meth has devastated, and of the heroes who continue to fight the war.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Using what he calls a "live-in reporting strategy," Reding's chronicle of a small-town crystal meth epidemic--about "the death of a way of life as much as... about the birth of a drug"--revolves around tiny Oelwein, Iowa, a 6,000-resident farming town nearly destroyed by the one-two punch of Big Agriculture modernization and skyrocketing meth production. Reding's wide cast of characters includes a family doctor, the man "in the best possible position from which to observe the meth phenomenon"; an addict who blew up his mother's house while cooking the stuff; and Lori Arnold (sister of actor Tom Arnold) who, as a teenager, built an extensive and wildly profitable crank empire in Ottumwa, Iowa (not once, but twice). Reding is at his best relating the bizarre, violent and disturbing stories from four years of research; heftier topics like big business and globalization, although fascinating, seem just out of Reding's weight class. A fascinating read for those with the stomach for it, Reding's unflinching look at a drug's rampage through the heartland stands out in an increasingly crowded field.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

For this powerful, terrifying look at the drug epidemic in America's heartland, Reding studied meth production and addiction in Oelwein over four years. The book's strength lies in its character studies and depictions of destroyed families -- many not for the squeamish -- as well as in its explanation of how meth producers integrate their operations to become major conglomerates. Despite the persuasive narrative, a few reviewers noted a weakness in Reding's attempt to link larger socioeconomic forces (such as the rise of agribusiness) to small towns' meth use and production. But the coupling of classic reporting and a compelling, timely story make *Methland* a book well worth reading.

From [Booklist](#)

Nathan Lein grew up on a family farm near Oelwein, Iowa, where "stubbornness is just part of the landscape." Oelwein's once-sturdy, farm-based economy has suffered, and from 1960 to 1990, its population fell 25 percent to about 6,000. Many family-owned farms disappeared, replaced by faceless corporate farms. Returning to Oelwein in his late twenties, in 2002 Lein became assistant county attorney "with a mandate to clean up meth."

In the economic vacuum created by the demise of family farms and falling wages at major employers (at Tyson meatpacking plant, to barely a third of their 1992 levels), good jobs disappeared, and methamphetamine manufacture and distribution became the only booming local enterprise, attended by increased crime, domestic abuse, and other pathologies. The situation was spiraling out of control. Reding relates how Lein and a few other local heroes determinedly fought back and reclaimed the town locals were calling Methlehem. Oelwein's story has implications for other rural areas, especially in the Midwest, West, and South, where Reding's tale should be vital cautionary reading.--Mike Tribby

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Elaine Bell:

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