



# The Boys in the Bunkhouse: Servitude and Salvation in the Heartland

*Dan Barry*

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## **The Boys in the Bunkhouse: Servitude and Salvation in the Heartland** Dan Barry

With this Dickensian tale from America's heartland, *New York Times* writer and columnist Dan Barry tells the harrowing yet uplifting story of the exploitation and abuse of a resilient group of men with intellectual disability, and the heroic efforts of those who helped them to find justice and reclaim their lives.

In the tiny Iowa farm town of Atalissa, dozens of men, all with intellectual disability and all from Texas, lived in an old schoolhouse. Before dawn each morning, they were bussed to a nearby processing plant, where they eviscerated turkeys in return for food, lodging, and \$65 a month. They lived in near servitude for more than thirty years, enduring increasing neglect, exploitation, and physical and emotional abuse—until state social workers, local journalists, and one tenacious labor lawyer helped these men achieve freedom.

Drawing on exhaustive interviews, Dan Barry dives deeply into the lives of the men, recording their memories of suffering, loneliness and fleeting joy, as well as the undying hope they maintained despite their traumatic circumstances. Barry explores how a small Iowa town remained oblivious to the plight of these men, analyzes the many causes for such profound and chronic negligence, and lays out the impact of the men's dramatic court case, which has spurred advocates—including President Obama—to push for just pay and improved working conditions for people living with disabilities.

A luminous work of social justice, told with compassion and compelling detail, *The Boys in the Bunkhouse* is more than just inspired storytelling. It is a clarion call for a vigilance that ensures inclusion and dignity for all.

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