



View from the Fazenda: A Tale of the Brazilian Heartlands

Ellen Bromfield Geld

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“I imagine everyone has a center of gravity,” says Ellen Bromfield Geld. “Something which binds one to the earth and gives sense and direction to what one does.” For Ellen, this center is a writing table before a window that looks out upon groves of pecan trees and mahogany-colored cattle in seas of grass. The place is Fazenda Pau D’Alho, Brazil, where she and her husband, Carson, have lived and farmed since 1961.

Healing the ravaged coffee plantation, rearing five children, exploring the outposts, the Gelds have created a dynamic yet peaceful life far from Ellen’s native Ohio. Their practice of sustainable agriculture, and Ellen’s plea for the preservation of Brazil’s remaining wilderness areas, reflect the legacy of her father, the novelist and farm visionary Louis Bromfield. Their shared vision is crystallized in her account of a cattle drive across the Pantanal, the vast flood plain on Brazil’s side of the Paraguay River. She describes a two-hundred year symbiosis between ranchers and a fragile ecosystem that is being threatened by development.

View from the Fazenda is distilled from fifty years of living in Brazil, weaving daily life on the farm into her quest to understand a nation. It portrays a true melting pot of people who—as conquerers, immigrants, or slaves, their blood and history mingled with those of native Indians—have created the character of Brazil. This huge, diverse county, living in several eras at the same time, is ever changing through its people’s amazing ability to “find a way.”

Ellen Bromfield Geld evokes the land and people of Brazil and offers readers an invigorating glimpse into a soulful life. “It seems to me that being a bit of a poet is perhaps the only way one can survive as a farmer,” she explains. “For in the end, more than anything, farming is a way of life you either love or become bitter enduring.”

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