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## The Heart Can Be Filled Anywhere on Earth

Bill Holm

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**Bill Holm : The Heart Can Be Filled Anywhere on Earth** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Heart Can Be Filled Anywhere on Earth:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Bill Holm's writing fills the heartBy Christine CendagortaBill Holm

captures the time, the place and the people of his Minnesota home and Icelandic ancestors beautifully and honestly. His writing is crisp but somehow musical. After reading his book *The Windows of Brimness* I couldn't wait to read more from him. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Holm is Timeless By Daniel A. Gislason Bill Holm is an exceptional storyteller about people and things he loves. He gets to the core of an issue or people, their heart and soul and their laughter. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Bill Holm's book By Wendy Prather Mr. Holm spoke at my college years ago, and I took an American literature class in which his published work was studied. He was an insightful, gifted author and storyteller. His work is well worth reading.

Growing up, Bill Holm knew what failure was: to die in Minneota. But after returning to his hometown (a very small dot on an ocean of grass) after 20 years absence, he wasn't so sure. Finding pleasure in the customs and characters of small-town life, in *The Heart Can Be Filled Anywhere on Earth* he writes with affection about the town elders, seen by those in the outside world as misfits and losers. They taught me what to value, what to ignore, what to embrace, and what to resist. In his trek through the heartland, Holm covers a satisfyingly wide emotional terrain, from scandalous affairs in the 1950s to his aunts touching attempts to transcend poverty with perfume and movie-star airs.

From Publishers Weekly Holm (*Coming Home Crazy*) is living once again in the small town of Minneota, Minn., where he grew up, and he is feeling sentimental about it. He is a smart writer and has some interesting things to say about sense of place, but there is an underlying softness in his attitude towards his hometown that makes these essays treacly, and no amount of literary references can sharpen them. "God knows I tried to escape, to do the right American thing, making a middle-class life in a gentler, lovelier, more urbane place, some better home for an eccentric intellectual misfit," he insists in an essay that rambles from the cost of living in Minneota to the meaning of the town's name ("much water" in Dakota) to reviewer misprints of the title of his first book, but one gets the feeling he never tried all that hard. The history of the town is much less interesting than the characters that populated it in Holm's childhood, and he devotes much of the book to biography of these characters, many of them originally from Iceland. An essay on the way that children are taught to mistrust strangers today segues into a tribute to the elderly woman who often baby-sat for him; an examination of poverty disintegrates into admiration for how his parents forced him to be kind to Sara Kline, "a Minneota 'bag lady,' years before that term became fashionable." It's not that this isn't heartwarming, it's just that it is familiar and sometimes suffers from smugness. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal As a youth, Holm defined failure as dying in his hometown of Minneota, Minnesota. He left to see the world, and when he returned? almost 40, broke, unemployed, divorced, unpublished, and his immediate family dead? home looked better to him. He began to write about the people who were most important to him in his childhood, the old Icelandic immigrants who were his relatives and neighbors in a tiny town on the western edge of Minnesota. In this memoir, we meet them all, including Pauline Bardal, a spinster without formal education who introduced the author to music and the piano, and Virgil Voltaire Gislason, a dandy and bon vivant who delighted in serving proper martinis, even during Prohibition. A fine writer with a wry, self-deprecating style, Holm has done what many authors aspire to do: make the dead live again. In doing so, he has produced a memoir that considers the question of what constitutes success in a culture infused with the immigrant desire to rise in the New World. Highly recommended for public libraries. ?Caroline A. Mitchell, Washington, D.C. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus s After living all over the US and teaching in China, Holm (*Coming Home Crazy*, not reviewed) reapplies himself with gusto and grandiloquence to life as lived in his hometown, the minute Minneota, Minn. "The Music of Failure," the book's centerpiece essay, showcases most of Holm's themes: the values of the local past, the particulars of family chronicles, the uses of memory, and, in contrast to these qualities, America's rootless lack of history and its obsession with individual success. Having met with failure, however, the author argues that failure is as American as success, and that memory, to be complete, must include those whose failures generally relegate them to obscurity. Holm focuses on the Bardals, a family of Icelandic immigrants who were never an all-American success story, dying out in rural poverty after a century in Minnesota. Pauline Bardal, the last survivor (whom Holm knew as a boy), nonetheless had her own virtues: laconic stoicism, natural charity, and even a minor talent for playing the organ. The author sketches two further examples of virtue in failure: Sara Kline, the town bag lady, to whom the young Holm was still required to show courtesy, and his Aunt Ole, whose romantic cheerfulness prevailed over genteel poverty. And he celebrates the qualities his austere Icelandic ancestors brought to the New World, including a love of literacy and hidden sociability. Holm occasionally provides some interesting contrasts with these musings on family and small-town characters and events by juxtaposing various of his experiences in China. But his exhaustive reaffirmation of his own "from-ness" curiously cuts out his experience of the rest of America in a sometimes ostentatious localism. Holm's frequent invocations of Walt Whitman and Tom Paine sometimes overtax the small-town context, but at their best, these essays make a virtue of parochialism. (22 bw photos, not seen) -- Copyright 1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.