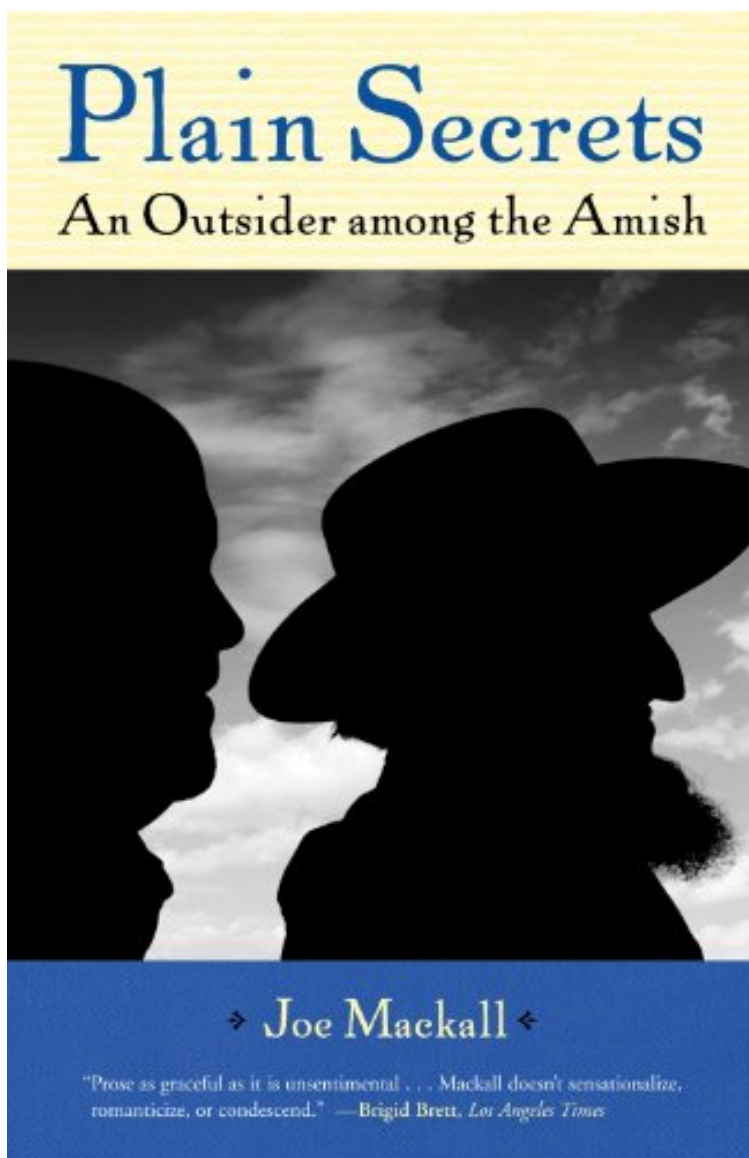


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Plain Secrets: An Outsider among the Amish



Par Joe Mackall

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Dtails sur le produit Publi le: 2007-05-15
Sorti le: 2007-05-15
Format: Ebook
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Joe Mackall has lived surrounded by the Swartzentruber Amish community of Ashland County, Ohio, for over sixteen years. They are the most traditional and insular of all the Amish sects: the Swartzentrubers live without gas, electricity, or indoor plumbing; without lights on their buggies or cushioned chairs in their homes; and without rumspringa, the recently popularized "running-around time" that some Amish sects allow their sixteen-year-olds. Over the years, Mackall has developed a steady relationship with the Shetler family (Samuel and Mary, their nine children, and their extended family). Plain Secretstells the Shetlers' story over these years, using their lives to paint a portrait of Swartzentruber Amish life and mores. During this time, Samuel's nephew Jonas finally rejects the strictures of the Amish way of

life for good, after two failed attempts to leave, and his bright young daughter reaches the end of school for Amish children: the eighth grade. But *Plain Secrets* is also the story of the unusual friendship between Samuel and Joe. Samuel is quietly bemused and, one suspects, secretly delighted at Joe's ignorance of crops and planting, carpentry and cattle. He knows Joe is planning to write a book about the family, and yet he allows him a glimpse of the tensions inside this intensely private community. These and other stories from the life of the family reveal the larger questions posed by the Amish way of life. If the continued existence of the Amish in the midst of modern society asks us to consider the appeal of traditional, highly restrictive, and gendered religious communities, it also asks how we romanticize or condemn these communities and why. Mackall's attempt to parse these questions to write as honestly as possible about what he has seen of Amish life tests his relationship with Samuel and reveals the limits of a friendship between "English" and Amish.

Revue de presse "In simple but elegant prose that matches the values of his subject, Joe Mackall takes us deep into the Amish community. He neither romanticizes nor condemns an alternate way of living, but provides stunning insight through the generosity and compassion of his own heart." Chris Offutt, author of *The Same River Twice* and *Kentucky Straight* "Joe Mackall's *Plain Secrets: An Outsider Among the Amish* meets the biggest challenge of a book such as this by living up to his subtitle: Mackall is both outside and among in equal measure, and it's the most difficult terrain to occupy. *Plain Secrets* vibrates in that in-betweenness, in ways that only songs or poems usually can, and it does so in prose that's as clear as water. It's built the way the Amish build their barn—everything here is plumb and level." Diana Hume George, author of *The Lonely Other: A Woman Watching America* "Joe Mackall's patience, empathy, and dogged curiosity illuminate this fine, fascinating study of an elusive culture. *Plain Secrets* is a provocative, humbling, and soulful book." Joshua Wolf Shenk, author of *Lincoln's Melancholy* Presentation de l'diteur Joe Mackall has lived surrounded by the Swartzentruber Amish community of Ashland County, Ohio, for over sixteen years. They are the most traditional and insular of all the Amish sects: the Swartzentrubers live without gas, electricity, or indoor plumbing; without lights on their buggies or cushioned chairs in their homes; and without rumspringa, the recently popularized "running-around time" that some Amish sects allow their sixteen-year-olds. Over the years, Mackall has developed a steady relationship with the Shetler family (Samuel and Mary, their nine children, and their extended family). *Plain Secret* tells the Shetlers' story over these years, using their lives to paint a portrait of Swartzentruber Amish life and mores. During this time, Samuel's nephew Jonas finally rejects the strictures of the Amish way of life for good, after two failed attempts to leave, and his bright young daughter reaches the end of school for Amish children: the eighth grade. But *Plain Secrets* is also the story of the unusual friendship between Samuel and Joe. Samuel is quietly bemused and, one suspects, secretly delighted at Joe's ignorance of crops and planting, carpentry and cattle. He knows Joe is planning to write a book about the family, and yet he allows him a glimpse of the tensions inside this intensely private community. These and other stories from the life of the family reveal the larger questions posed by the Amish way of life. If the continued existence of the Amish in the midst of modern society asks us to consider the appeal of traditional, highly restrictive, and gendered religious communities, it also asks how we romanticize or condemn these communities and why. Mackall's attempt to parse these questions to write as honestly as possible about what he has seen of Amish life tests his relationship with Samuel and reveals the limits of a friendship between "English" and Amish.