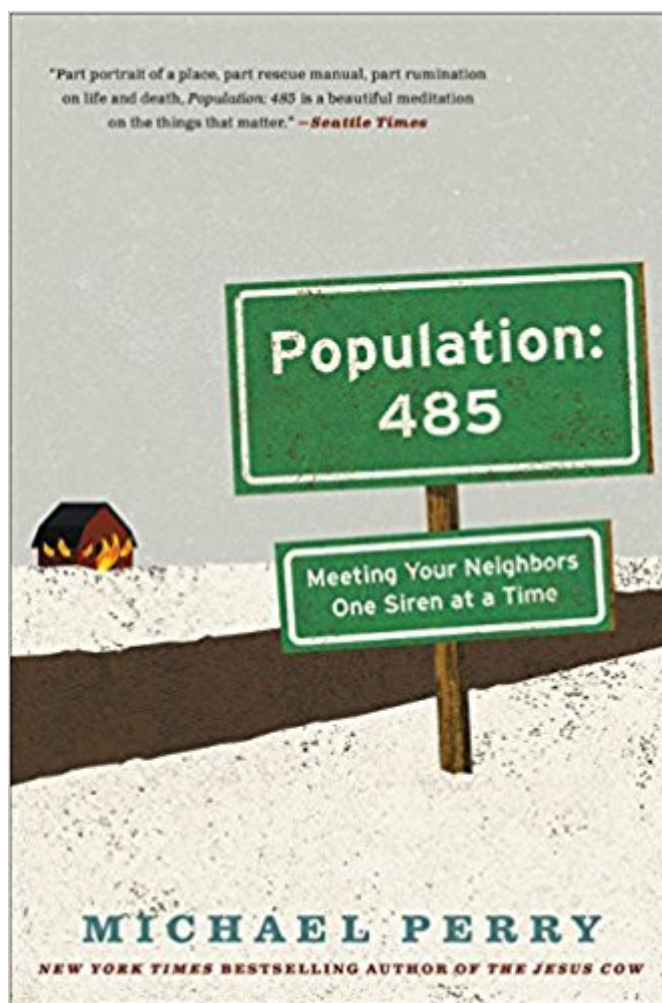


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# Population: 485- Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren At A Time (P.S.)



## Synopsis

Mike Perry's extraordinary and thoughtful account of meeting the people of his small hometown by joining the fire and rescue team was a breakout hit that resonates with unadorned heroism • (USA Today) Welcome to New Auburn, Wisconsin (population: 485) where the local vigilante is a farmer's wife armed with a pistol and a Bible, the most senior member of the volunteer fire department is a cross-eyed butcher with one kidney and two ex-wives (both of whom work at the only gas station in town), and the back roads are haunted by the ghosts of children and farmers. Michael Perry loves this place. He grew up here, and now after a decade away he has returned. Unable to polka or repair his own pickup, his farm-boy hands gone soft after years of writing, Mike figures the best way to regain his credibility is to join the volunteer fire department. Against a backdrop of fires and tangled wrecks, bar fights and smelt feeds, he tells a frequently comic tale leavened with moments of heartbreaking delicacy and searing tragedy. Tracing his calls on a map in the little firehouse, he sees a dense, benevolent web, spun one frantic zigzag at a time • from which the story of a tiny town emerges.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When writer Perry returned to his tiny childhood town, New Auburn, Wisc., after 12 years away, he joined the village's volunteer fire and rescue department. Six years later, he'd begun to understand at last that to truly live in a place, you must give your life to that place. These charming, discursive essays are loosely structured around the calls Perry responds to as a volunteer EMT, including

everything from a collision at the local Laundromat to heart attacks, fires and suicides. Perry's mosaic of smalltown life also paints charming portraits of the town's memorable characters, such as the One-Eyed Beagle, another firefighter. Perry's insights into the small-town mentality come from apparent contemplation, and he writes about them with good humor, in prose reminiscent of Rick Bragg's: "The old man says he had a woozy spell, and so he took some nitroglycerin pills. This is like saying you had high blood pressure so you did your taxes." In spite of an enormous surprise in the final chapter, the book's lack of central conflict leaves it feeling desultory, like a collection of good magazine pieces rather than a propulsive chronicle of quirky small-towners a la John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. Still, there are moments in which Perry achieves an unforced lyricism: Rescue work is like jazz. Improvisation based on fundamentals. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Being a volunteer EMT is no small challenge, even in a town as small as New Auburn, Wisconsin. Perry mixes his tales of heroic rescues with his stories of small-town life. His book opens with his team attempting to rescue a teenage girl from a disastrous car wreck on a dangerous bend of road. As part of the volunteer fire department, Perry--along with his brother and mother-- pulls people from mangled cars and answers 911 calls from critically ill people. He also relates how New Auburn got its name (after going through three others), and shares the lives of his fellow volunteers, such as Beagle, a man who can't use the town's only gas station because both of his ex-wives work there. He details the technicalities of being a volunteer--the many terminologies one needs to memorize, and also crucial, life-saving techniques, such as CPR and controlling a house fire by puncturing a hole in its roof. Tragic at times, funny at others, Perry's memoir will appeal to anyone curious about small-town life. Kristine Huntley Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I bought this book on a lark after seeing Justin Vernon (of Bon Iver fame) recommend it to someone on twitter. It's outside of the usual genres I read and I didn't really know what to expect but I found myself amused, touched, enlightened, and constantly surprised at every turn of the page. Michael Perry has a way with words that's intellectual without being academic or high-falutin'. He'll be talking about sitting in his LAY-Z-Boy picking the mud off his boots and suddenly throw out a word you have to look up (I say that as someone with a pretty substantial vocabulary) then draw some parallel to something Edgar Allen Poe once said. He constantly surprises you like that. He's very easy to

read though. He's also hilarious. It's usually not even what he says, but how he says it that had me in stitches half the time. It honestly takes a lot for something to make me laugh out loud but I actually had to quit reading this at night when my roommates were trying to sleep because my uproarious laughter woke them up so much. Michael Perry is now one of my top 3 favorite writers. It doesn't matter what he's writing about, it's always entertaining. If you like this book I highly recommend you read his book *Truck* as well. Before Michael Perry I never would have imagined myself reading a book about someone restoring an old truck, AND loving it so much that I limited myself to only a few pages a day, so it wouldn't end so soon. If you're expecting a book all about being an EMT or how to survive small-town life, it might not meet those expectations, but you will enjoy it anyway. Highly recommend

If you want to read a literary book on firefighting or small town living then this is the book. *Population: 485* is a hilarious and moving collection of essays written about New Auburn, Wisconsin; a town of, yes, you guessed it--485 people. Not only is Michael Perry a skilled writer, he is also a volunteer firefighter/emt, and he captures the chaos and insanity of this world beautifully. Not many firefighters are dedicated to the literary tradition of writing, so it isn't easy to find such a talented voice to account their day to day lives. Perry is the man. Never have I had more respect for volunteer firefighters than I do now. In New Auburn, rarely are they truly off-duty. They leave work, family, or home at a moment's notice and even respond to calls alone with no idea of who will show up or when. Regardless of back up, when the beeper goes off Michael Perry goes running, sometimes in spandex cycling shorts, other times in cowboy boots. The rural landscape has dangers all its own: an explosively defecating cow or a clan of suspicious drunk rednecks armed to the hilt in the middle of nowhere. Despite the perils, Perry loves small town living, although he does sometimes get a hankering to take off and roam. He describes in warm detail the denizens of his environs and often accounts their deaths as well. In a town as small as New Auburn, everyone knows everyone, and it's hard to forget the exact curve of road where your neighbor died. Death comes with the territory and Perry does not skirt it. He is a man's man, but with a sensitive side inclined to philosophize and contemplate all that he is witness to. When he's not skinning deer or traipsing through a swamp hunting duck, he's hanging out at the local poetry reading. There's a touch of Hemingway here, although unlike the American Master, Perry is expert at making fun of himself and bringing the "heroes" down to earth. He recounts the foibles, follies, and mishaps of the firefighters who respond in the middle of the night for almost no pay in hilarious detail. One minute Perry had me laughing out loud; the next I was struck silent by his ruminations on death, loss, and

the intangible bonds of love that hold the entire town together. Perry can fight fire AND write. An awesome combination.

I read this a few years ago and read it again to discuss for my book club. Perry's engaging writing style kept me smiling just as much the second time as the first. His insights about the residents of his small town and about those he fights fires with and with whom he provides EMT services are both wise and entertaining. I smiled and I cried. If only we all could see the positives and humor in our lives, our friends and our family members as Perry does in his. As members of my book club discussed it, two women admitted, "I'm in love with Michael Perry." He's strong and resolute, he's tender and caring. And his writing is sublime.

Michael Perry writes very honestly about his life in small town Wisconsin. After living elsewhere for years he returned to his hometown and joined the local fire department as a way to get reacquainted with his community and the locals. I read a later book of his and then read this one after discovering how much I enjoyed his writing. I love how Mike writes out everything he thinks and feels very honestly. Mike was raised in a very religious setting as a child and he left all that when he grew up. I do wish Mike could come back to God as an adult and have a personal relationship with God. After all, God is what matters most in life. And the last chapter was so sad when Mike tells how his sister-in-law was killed after being married to his brother for only 7 weeks or so. But as you will discover in a later book this little brother happily remarried after his mother-in-law intervened and helped him find a new wife. I suddenly had to buy several of Mike's books and audio CDs after discovering that he existed. I found his books through .

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