

### Pie Town Woman: The Hard Life and Good Times of a New Mexico Homesteader

Joan Myers



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Pie Town, New Mexico, was immortalized in 1940 in the photographs of Russell Lee, who documented life in the high, dry farming community as part of the Farm Security Administration's New Deal survey of American life. This book tells the story of one of the women photographed by Lee. Doris Caudill lived on a homestead with her husband and daughter, who was six years old when Lee made his famous photographs, many of which show Doris planting her garden, canning vegetables, and milking cows. Now, more than sixty years later, Joan Myers, herself a distinguished photographer, introduces us to the woman behind the pictures.

Raised in West Texas, Doris first came to Pie Town on summer trips as a teenager. Faro Caudill courted her in Pie Town and brought her as a young bride to live in a dugout on a homestead in nearby Divide. Money was as scarce as water in this desert community, and a trip to Albuquerque, 180 miles away, was unimaginable. The Caudills went there only once while they lived in Pie Town, to buy a radio at Montgomery Ward. The nearest doctor was 60 miles from Pie Town, so babies were born at home and mothers had to be vigilant against accidents and snakebites. Although the Caudills and their neighbors lived in poverty that is hard for twenty-first-century Americans to imagine, Doris's memories of those Great Depression days are the happiest of her life. She was a lively young woman in the 1930s, and her sense of fun and the pleasure that the people in the tiny community took in each other's company more than made up for the hardships they endured.

Joan Myers tells Doris's story and recounts the experiences of Russell and Jean Lee during their stay in Pie Town. Woven through Myers's narrative are her musings on the relationships among memory, photographs, and actual events. Included are a selection of Lee's iconic photographs, Doris's family snapshots, and photographs taken by Myers herself showing the visual residue of those bygone years.

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