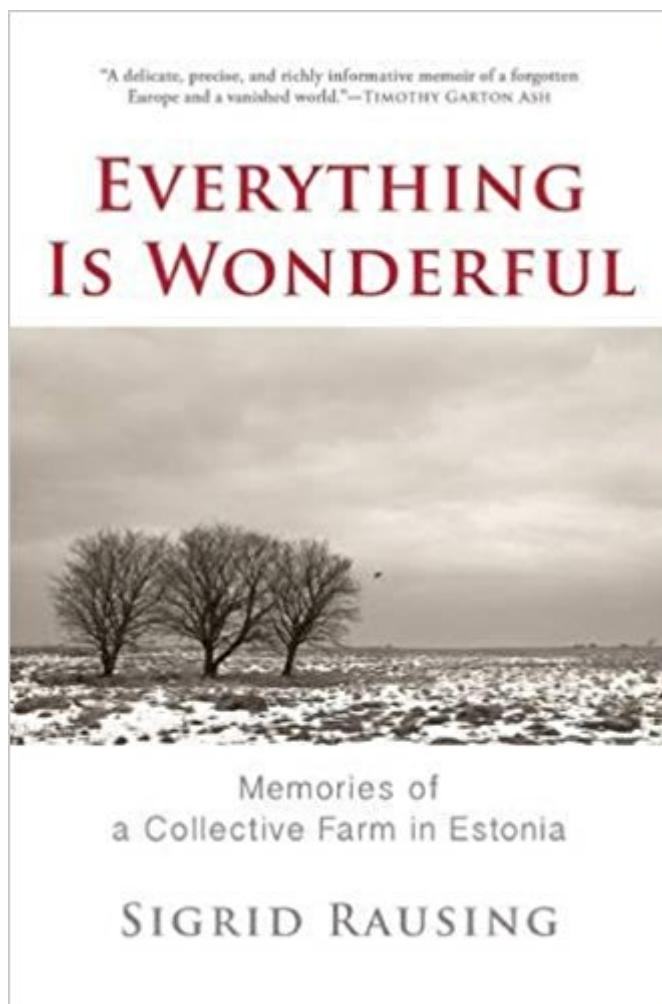


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# Everything Is Wonderful: Memories Of A Collective Farm In Estonia



## Synopsis

Just like it was taken for granted that houses could be abandoned and slowly decay, so it was taken for granted that people died in prisons, and that it was possible that no-one would really ever know the cause of death. This is the nature of totalitarianism. In 1993-94 Sigrid Rausing completed her anthropological fieldwork on the peninsula of Noarootsi, a former Soviet border protection zone in Estonia. Abandoned watch towers dotted the coast line, and the huge fields of the Lenin collective farm were lying fallow, waiting for claims from former owners, fleeing war and Soviet and Nazi occupation. Rausing's conversations with the local people touched on many subjects: the economic privations of post-Soviet existence, the bewildering influx of western products, and the Swedish background of many of them. In *Everything Is Wonderful* Rausing reflects on history, political repression, and the story of the minority Swedes in the area. She lived and worked amongst the villagers, witnessing their transition from repression to freedom, and from Soviet neglect to post-Soviet austerity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A beautifully remembered account of Rausing's anthropological fieldwork on a collective farm in Estonia in the 1990s: fascinating as the portrait of an isolated community, and the larger politics of the time." Andrew Motion, The Times Literary Supplement (Best Books of the Year) "Pages of dreamlike prose explore Estonia's terrible Nazi-Soviet past, the trauma of dictatorship, and how memory processes that trauma. . . The farm, dissolved in the mid-1990s, is remembered fondly at times by Rausing . . . In *Everything Is Wonderful* she

evokes the spirit of a lost Baltic community and, in so doing, has written a rather beautiful book. *Financial Times* "Finely observed, intimate description . . . . There is a fragility in [Rausing's] personal circumstances, too." *Economist* "An entrancing, dreamlike account of rural life in post-Soviet Estonia. . . . [Rausing] has written a strange, wonderful, hallucinatory exploration of a year she spent on a collapsing post-Soviet collective farm in Estonia. . . . She ventures no firm conclusions, and she forces her narrative into no political straightjacket. This is not that kind of book. . . . This is not the story of a moneyed member of the golden elite, but rather of a thoughtful observer trying to make sense of herself and her surroundings. It is extremely affecting." *Daily Telegraph* "Sigrid Rausing's memoir is a charming, unsettling and unusually intimate glimpse into the life of an Estonian village in transition." *Anne Applebaum* "A deliciously enjoyable, fascinating and important book that works as scholarship, diary and chronicle; it's a historical study of place, memory and tragedy that reveals the hellish experience of Estonia under Nazis and Soviets, it's a unique anthropological examination of a peculiar now vanished civilisation, the collective farm, and it's also a delightfully quirky diary of a Swedish PhD in the early 1990s that chronicles extraordinary lives of ordinary Estonian people with a playful curiosity." *Simon Sebag Montefiore* "Sigrid Rausing's lyrical and evocative description of a former collective farm on a remote peninsula in Estonia portrays the transition from Soviet rule to independence. A startling and beautiful book." *Lady Antonia Fraser* "Intimate, lyrical and evocative; Sigrid Rausing's memoir captures a forgotten world, on the cusp between Soviet occupation and a Western future. A finely drawn literary account of people and places, encompassing history, geography, culture and biography." *Edward Lucas* "A delicate, precise, and richly informative memoir of a forgotten Europe and a vanished world." *Timothy Garton Ash* "In 1993-94, Sigrid Rausing spent a year doing anthropological fieldwork in a former collective farm in post-Soviet Estonia. Twenty years on, that work, and the diaries she kept at the time, and later during a return visit in 2003, come together in this remarkable and instructive book, where continually interesting individual characters are given a broader historical and cultural context. Dr. Rausing combines a keen eye for the telling detail with striking; at times lyrical; descriptions of rural lives and landscapes, and in documenting the 'lost futures' of those working there, reminds us again of the dreadful human cost of totalitarianism." *Robert Conquest* "Beautiful, gentle and haunting. Every single edge in it seems to be frayed. And what a triumph it is to have allowed that frayedness to survive the whole process of writing it down. It is alive like an old frayed tapestry found in old trunk. Perhaps archaically beautiful is the phrase I am groping after. Like a sort of dance of the blind, slow and

gentle, feeling its way, the shoes moving carefully over the floor.â€”Adam Nicolson;A beautifully written memoir of what it was like to spend a year in Estonia in the early nineties, the first decade of its re-emergence as an independent nation. As the publisher and now editor of *Granta*, she knows well the qualities of good narrative nonfiction, and her work could easily fit in the pages of her magazine. . . . It is a good thing that Sigrid Rausing has dared to revisit her story and tell it in a way that more readers can grasp it. For the times of transition from darkness to light can be the toughest moments to remember.â€”David Rothenberg, *Central and Eastern European Life and News* (London);An intimate look at the devastations of communism in Estonia. . . . [a] sensuous, character-rich portrait of the denuded landscape, ruined economy, and erratic, alcoholic personalities she encountered as a dreamy, lonely observer and teacher. . . . [Rausing] unearths fascinating history of this remote area, annexed and depleted by Russia, then Germany, then the Soviet Union. . . . A mellifluous portrait of a country slowly and painfully pulling itself into the European world.â€”Kirkus Reviews;Evocative;With a keen, level eye, Rausing reconstructs the blasted landscape of abandoned farmhouses and watchtowers, the truculent personalities of the locals, including her louche drunken landlord Toivo, and the terrible scars of history.â€”Publishers Weekly

Sigrid Rausing is a writer, philanthropist, anthropologist, and publisher. She is the founder of the Sigrid Rausing Trust, and publisher of *Granta* magazine and *Granta Books*. She is the author of "History, Memory, and Identity in Post-Soviet Estonia: The End of a Collective Farm" (Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology). "Everything Is Wonderful" is her first trade book.

Sigrid Rausing chose to spend a year on a remote collective farm in Estonia during that country's transition from Soviet rule to independence. It was a time of great uncertainty, politically, socially and economically. For Rausing, the general feeling of disorientation and confusion was compounded by linguistic barriers and the psychological difficulties in building relationships with people whose lives and livelihoods were collapsing around them. She is a sensitive, intelligent and well schooled observer, providing rich anthropological commentary interspersed with heartfelt personal observations. The result is a fascinating read about a new society struggling to emerge out of the wreck of the old. The first two thirds of the book is especially informative on Estonian history, culture and identity.

Somewhere, painfully there is a story here, half told, mostly silent book about not sure what. No

clear description, you must search and search for meaning, Swedes are so to the point of honesty as to be rude but in the writing, you wander around lost and hopeless, maybe the book has no point, hurt to read, I hoped for more, but got a limp handshake.

I read everything I can get my hands on about Estonia, and I learn something with each read. Unfortunately, I learned little from this book. I think there's a little too much personal interaction that is only interesting to the writer, and not the reader.

certainly one of the best books written that shows a different culture and harsh life conditions in a remote part of the world...

The book was very helpful explaining all of the ethnic and political influences in Estonia. I spent a few days in the West then Tallinn then Narva. This helps explain the differences.

Good for anyone wanting to understand the history of Estonia and how that is shaping the liberated Estonia since 1991.

Very interesting book dealing with an area that's been an interest of mine since college. Well written.

Excellent reading about the hardships experienced in an occupied Estonia during the Soviet Russia occupation..

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