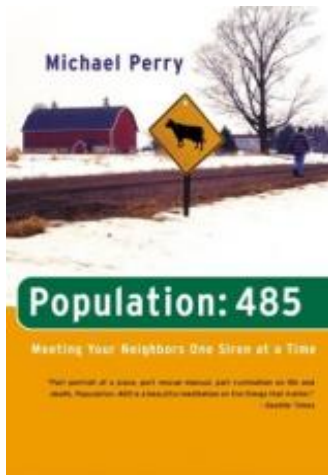


# Population: 485, Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time

by Michael Perry



## About the Book

Here 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.

## Discussion Guide

1. Have you returned home after being away for an extended period? If so, what was it like? Was town the same as you remembered? Did you choose to stay?
2. Does New Auburn remind you of your community or any community you have been to? While Perry highlights details intended to make New Auburn and some of its residents seem unique, is it possible that these details also make them more universal?
3. What is the small town dynamic? How does it differ from life in bigger cities? How is the small town dynamic replicated within segments of larger cities? Perry has said he enjoys exploring New York City. Might there not be comfort in the anonymity of a larger place?

4. Perry seems to deal with the notion of death and emergency situations very calmly and rationally. Are these abilities inherent, or can they be learned? How do you deal with similar situations? How did you feel when you read the line, "Puke is the great constant."?

5. Perry explores the stressful aspects of fire and ambulance calls, but he also suggests that even the worst calls weave themselves into a sense of history and place that is ultimately comforting. How does the passage of time contribute to this process? How might it differ from person to person?

6. Not everyone can go home or would want to. What is it in Perry's personality that draws him back to his hometown? Is finding your place in the community an active or a passive process?

7. If you could share a bowl of piping hot deep-fried cheese curds with one character in **Population: 485**, who would it be, and why?

## Author Bio

Michael Perry is a humorist, radio host, songwriter, and the *New York Times* bestselling author of several nonfiction books, including VISITING TOM and POPULATION: 485, as well as a novel, THE JESUS COW. He lives in northern Wisconsin with his family and can be found online at [www.sneezingcow.com](http://www.sneezingcow.com).

## Critical Praise

"I have been waiting for thirty years for a fresh and talented voice to rise out of the volunteer fire service in America, and finally it has arrived in Michael Perry's **Population 485**. Perry is a firefighter/EMT and he makes you feel you are responding right along with him to fires, auto wrecks, even suicides, and his hard work is told with the thoughtfulness and gracefulness of a first responder who cares about people, his town, our country, and the world we live in. But this is more than a book about a small town fire department. It is a literary venture told on the cusp of service to his community - all written with a soft human touch by an intuitive writer with a distinctive and refined American style. Firefighters and EMTs will be talking about this book for a long time to come. And, so will all readers who have a love for American literature. This is a small town story in the big tradition of Sherwood Anderson and James Agee."

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