

A poetic portrait of 1970s Vermont

"Judevine: A Love Song for a Place and Its People."

David Budbill, Rootstock Publishing, 2025.

David Budbill's Judevine, Vermont, like Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, is a fictional immortalization of a real place, its people, and its time. Behind "Judevine" is the Lamoille County village of Wolcott, to which Budbill moved in the 1970s and recreated, over the next 20 years, his neighbors' lives in eight books of narrative poems, an ever-evolving series of plays, and musical readings in collaboration with the composer William Parker.

The present volume, assembled by Budbill's daughter, offers all the Judevine poems and one of the plays to a new generation of readers. The result is a passionate, compassionate, deeply moving portrait of a lost Vermont.



One-Minute Book Reviews

Laura Stevenson

the match." The collective judgment is that Hermie was always "looking for the perfect place/That's what all those fires were about/And in the end he found that place/The bread truck wouldn't burn."

Behind Budbill's "villager" pose is a wide-ranging literary heritage. "Crazy Two-Foot Makes it 'Round Again" is a classic collection of 12 calendar poems

that sensitively follow the changes in Judevine's landscape from one November to the next. "Carot's Pool" is a dream vision in which the poet, dozing off as he admires the beauties of the pond, is suddenly visited by a nightmare vision of the Vietnam War. "The Pulp Cutter's Nativity" is a play that re-sets the 15th century English "Second Shepherd's Play" in Judevine, with characters familiar from earlier poems.

The most memorable aspect of the collection, however, is the life it brings to the struggling, impoverished, indomitable people of this unknown, unappreciated village. There's Albert, who according to the town gossip, "knows more ways a makin' money doin' nothin'/'an the whole rest athe world put together," but has turned his trailer into an architectural wonder. Similarly, Roy McInnes, a welder, has designed and built himself a shop that looks like "an early Christian basilica,/or something Gothic," which "soars—not too high or very gracefully,/but it soars." Amid the admiring celebration of unrecognized talents, there are also delicate portraits of unrecognized relationships. There is the celibate couple of Edgar Whitcomb, the postmaster, and Laura Cate, the town clerk, who lunch together every day and walk to church together ... and no more. At the opposite end of the spectrum, there is the affair of Tommy, a damaged Vietnam vet, and embittered, angry Grace—portrayed in the achingly tender/bitter poem "A Fleeting Animal" that Tommy writes about their love.

The appreciation and understanding of Judevine's people makes the book, as its subtitle says, "a love song." To read it is to re-experience—and belatedly appreciate—the forgotten corner of Vermont that David Budbill deeply loved.

