



Living in harmony with the land

BY BARBARA LLOYD MCMICHAEL

From southern Oregon to the San Juan Islands, Jessica Gigot spent her early adulthood with her hands in the dirt, and in the process learned how to put down roots.

“A Little Bit of Land” is a memoir composed of essays that reflect on Gigot’s journey to becoming land literate as she explores the responsibilities of committing to a particular piece of ground, “to tend and conserve it, to make the place better than when I arrived, to steward the soil, making every effort to cultivate and preserve a fertility that could foster food in the future.”

Aside from attending a farming camp as a first-grader, Gigot went through most of her suburban childhood preoccupied with jazz dance classes and soccer practice, fueled by fast food and instant meals.

But as a college freshman, she had a professor that sparked her fascination in the field of biology. During her undergraduate years, Gigot studied *Drosophila* flies in the lab and bumblebees in the field. She ventured to New Zealand one summer to participate in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms program.

After graduating from college, Gigot pursued another agricultural experience as an intern at a medicinal herb farm in Applegate Valley, at the confluence of the Coast and Siskiyou mountain ranges.

A second internship took her to a homestead farm on Lopez Island. That’s where she discovered the writings of Wendell Berry and began to consider his discussion of nurturers versus exploiters, and how her own consumption habits probably put her in the latter category.

A dream began to percolate –

maybe Gigot could take up farming herself. But first she decided to go back to graduate school at Washington State University to learn more about agricultural science. She completed that program and moved on to pursue a doctorate at Oregon State University.

Eventually, she bought a small set of acreage in Skagit Valley and committed to becoming a full-time farmer. “A Little Bit of Land” covers nearly 20 years, and while the story is organized by chronology in tandem with geography, other essays interspersed throughout weigh in on

themes such as soil, water and wind.

In all of these writings, Gigot has a penchant for straying off into memories of other experiences and inspirations that have informed her choices over the years, so the book’s organization is somewhat muddled by detours.

But this shouldn’t interrupt readers. Gigot’s writing is lyrical and she is generous in sharing the quest she undertakes. You’ll learn about all of the work required in “de-hobbifying” her

farm and practicing sustainable agriculture.

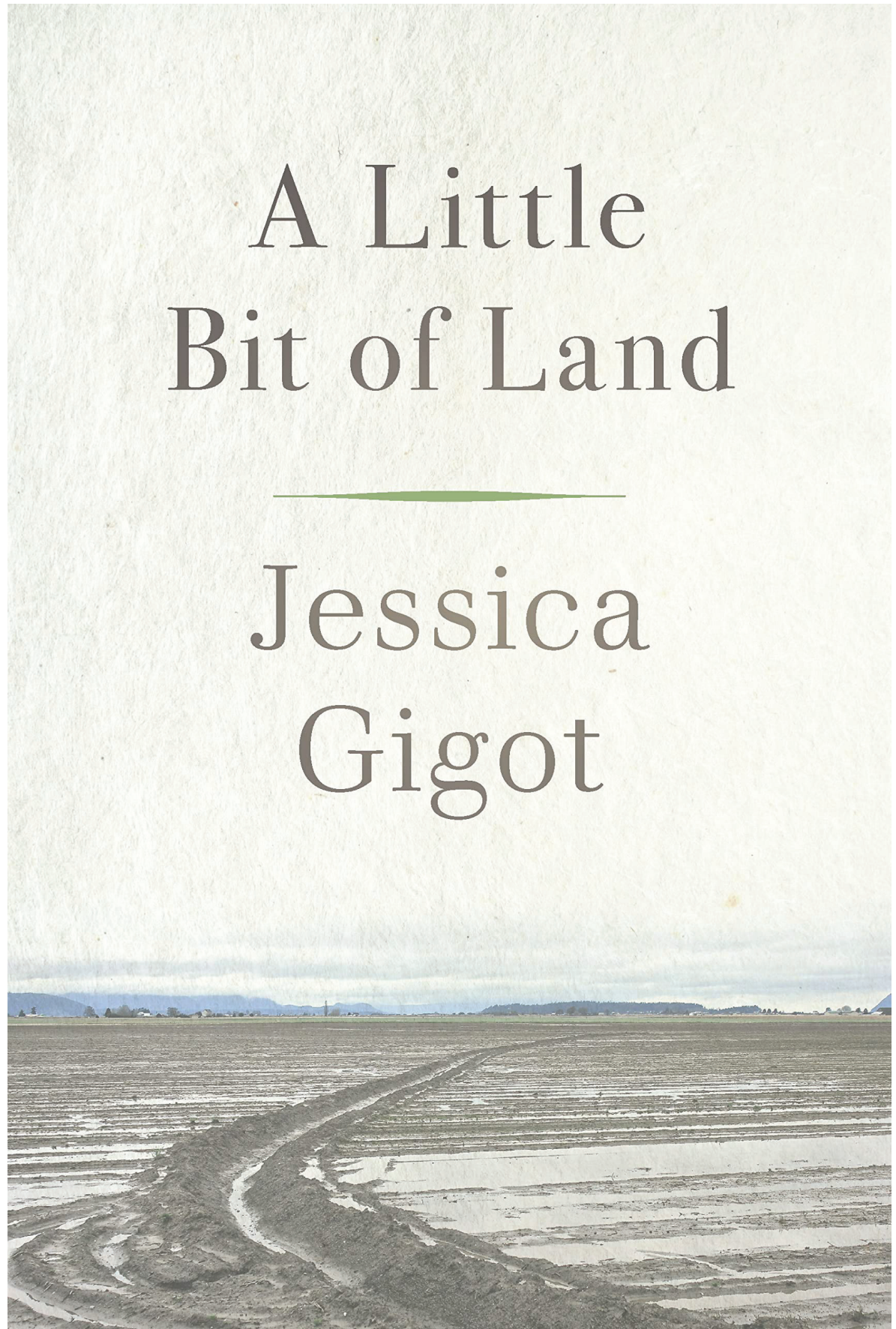
There are potatoes and purslane and baby squash to harvest. There are sheep to milk and to shear. There are lessons to be learned about Indigenous food sovereignty.

Even in a contemporary global, industrialized food complex, “I wanted to believe that a small farm could exist and even thrive,” she writes. “A Little Bit of Land” offers readers abundant food for thought.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at barbalmcm@gmail.com.

A Little Bit of Land

Jessica Gigot



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