

Awards and Critical Acclaim for *Lab Girl*

Winner (2016) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS)'s Science Books & Films Best List

PEN/E. O. Wilson Literary Science Writing Award Finalist 2017

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography

A *New York Times* 2016 Notable Book

Named one of *TIME* magazine's "100 Most Influential People"

An Amazon Top 20 Best Book of 2016

A *Washington Post* Best Memoir of 2016

A *TIME* and *Entertainment Weekly* Best Book of 2016

National bestseller

"It is a rare breed of scientist who is both a leader in her field and a great writer, but Hope Jahren is both. A tenured professor at the University of Hawaii, Jahren has built a career and a reputation in science by unearthing secrets hidden in fossilized plant life. Her work has resulted in at least 70 studies in dozens of journals, but it's also given her a platform to talk about something else: widespread sexual harassment and discrimination in science. On her blog, in op-eds and in her new memoir, *Lab Girl*, Jahren wields her influence to call out a culture that has caused women to flee the field she so loves. That's why she does it: she loves science. And whether she's writing about lab funding, discrimination or deciduous trees, she has a way of making you love it too." — Siobhan O'Connor, *TIME*, 100 Most Influential People

"*Lab Girl* made me look at trees differently. It compelled me to ponder the astonishing grace and gumption of a seed. Perhaps most importantly, it introduced me to a deeply inspiring woman—a scientist so passionate about her work I felt myself vividly with her on every page. This is a smart, enthralling, and winning debut." — Cheryl Strayed

"*Lab Girl* surprised, delighted, and moved me. I was drawn in from the start by the clarity and beauty of Jahren's prose, whether she was examining the inner world of a seed, the ecosystem around the trunk of a tree, or recounting her own inspiring journey. With *Lab Girl*, Jahren joins those talented scientists who are able to reveal to us the miracle of this world in which we live." — Abraham Verghese

"Some people are great writers, while other people live lives of adventure and importance. Almost no one does both. Hope Jahren does both. She makes me wish I'd been a scientist." — Ann Patchett

"Jahren has dedicated her life's work to the study of trees with extraordinary single-mindedness and insight. *Lab Girl* is both an engaging account of her maturity as a scientist and a heartfelt paean to plants. They emerge from her memoir as much more than a bundle of biological processes, but beings with strange, secret lives, supported by astonishingly elegant machinery... Lucid, brilliant." — Harriet Baker, *Times Literary Supplement*

“Award-winning scientist Jahren delivers a personal memoir and a paean to the natural world. The author’s father was a science teacher who encouraged her play in the laboratory, and her mother was a student of English literature who nurtured her love of reading. Both of these early influences engrossingly combine in this adroit story of a dedication to science. Jahren’s journey from student to scientist has the narrative tension of a novel, and characters she imbues with real depth. The heroes in this tale are the plants that the author studies, and throughout, she employs her facility with words to engage her readers. We learn much along the way... Trees are of key interests to Jahren, and at times she waxes poetic. The author draws many parallels between her subjects and herself. This is her story, after all, and we are engaged beyond expectation as she relates her struggle in building and running laboratory after laboratory at the universities that have employed her. Present throughout is her lab partner, a disaffected genius named Bill, whom she recruited when she was a graduate student and with whom she’s worked ever since. The author’s tenacity, hope, and gratitude are all evident as she and Bill chase the sweetness of discovery in the face of the harsh economic realities of the research scientist. Jahren transcends both memoir and science writing in this literary fusion of both genres.” — *Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

“Luminous... Peppered with literary references to Genet, Beckett, Dickens and Thoreau, Jahren’s honest prose is insightful, eloquent and funny, and she has a gift for explaining hard science in the most bewitching way. The heart of the book is the story of her touching relationship with Bill, her brilliant lab partner. *Lab Girl* is a book about being a woman in science as much as it is a clarion call to follow your passion. In the end, it’s easy to see the book as a love note—not just to plants, to science and to the sweetness of discovery, but also to friendship and loyalty, to journeys big and small to belonging and becoming.” — Kathleen Yale, *Orion*

“Jahren, a professor of geobiology, recounts her unfolding journey to discover ‘what it’s like to be a plant’ in this darkly humorous, emotionally raw, and exquisitely crafted memoir. Jahren, who ‘loves [her] calling to excess,’ describes the joy of working alone at night, the ‘multidimensional glory’ of a manic episode, scavenging jury-rigged equipment from a retiring colleague, or spontaneously road-tripping with students. She likens elements of her scientific career to a plant driven by need and instinct. But the most extraordinary and delightful element of her narrative is her partnership with Bill, her lab partner and caring best friend. It’s a rare portrait of a deep relationship in which mutual esteem [is] unmarred by sexual tension. For Jahren, a life in science yields the gratification of asking, knowing, and telling; for the reader, the joy is in hearing about the process as much as the results.” — *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Breathtakingly honest, affecting... She connects her own experiences to the works of Charles Dickens, E. E. Cummings, and Harper Lee—often humorously—with the same ease that she describes leaf venation. This mingling of the literary and the scientific highlights their connections, as well as the humanity underlying both disciplines. Fascinating plant facts do the double work of opening avenues for deeper reflection... At its core, *Lab Girl* is a book about seeing—with the eyes, but also the hands and the heart. Jahren spends the book teaching us

that if we just look closely enough, we can see the opal lattice on a hackberry seed, the depths of loyalty in our closest friends, the wonder in a single leaf, and what we ourselves are supposed to become... Gorgeous.” — Carolyn Beans, *American Scientist*

“With *Lab Girl*, Jahren has taken the form of the memoir and done something remarkable with it. She swerves from observations about plant life to a report from the interior of her tortured brain to adventures on the road with Bill—and somehow, it all works... I love this book for its honesty, its hilarity and its brilliant sharp edges. Jahren has some serious literary chops to go along with all that science she gets up to. I can’t wait to see what comes next. Powerful and disarming.” — Amy Stewart, *The Washington Post*

“A scientific memoir that’s beautifully human. Jahren, a geochemist, botanist and geobiologist, has spent the better part of the past two decades studying the secret lives of plants. Part memoir, part biology text, part criticism of the status quo of the scientific community, *Lab Girl* reminds us that, in ways, we are strikingly like our blossoming brethren. *Lab Girl* is anything but technical. It is full of pleasing turns of phrase, references to literary figures like Genet and Dickens, and a running botany allusion that punctuates the book’s biographical story. Most of all, it’s deeply personal, following Jahren’s battle with manic depression; a harrowing pregnancy; her unending struggle to secure funding in a quickly drying financial desert; and the loving platonic relationship she shares with her protégé and lab manager, Bill. Jahren’s work has taken her around the world, from the ancient forests of Norway and Denmark to the remote and treeless Arctic, and most recently to the lush gardens of Hawaii. Throughout, she inserts short essays about the life cycles of plants—the unwavering obstinacy of the cactus, or the careful budgeting of resources of a deciduous tree—juxtaposed with the traumas and triumphs of her own academic and personal life. It is not the book a scientist usually writes; in its depth and rawness, *Lab Girl* steps into uncharted territory. It is a book, Jahren [says], intended to break down the wall between scientists and the rest of the world.” —Melissa Cronin, *Popular Science*

“A powerful new memoir... Jahren is a remarkable scientist who turns out to be a remarkable writer as well. A geobiologist who can take you into the deepest secrets of plants and earth, then turn around and stun you with her own deeply human story. Think Stephen Jay Gould or Oliver Sacks. But Jahren is a woman in science, who speaks plainly to just how rugged that can be. And to the incredible machinery of life around us.” — Tom Ashbrook, *On Point*, National Public Radio

“Gratifying, spirited... a moving chronicle of an eminent research scientist’s life... It takes a passionate geobiologist with the soul of a poet to make us swoon in the face of computational amplitude... Jahren’s aim is to make the reader appreciate the fascinations of studying flora, to infect us with the same enthusiasm that has driven her ever since she was a child hanging around in her father’s lab, falling hard for the sensuous allures of the slide rule. Early on she discovers one generous mystery of scientific inquiry—in the course of making it, it makes you... Jahren’s literary bent renders dense material digestible and lyrical, in fables that parallel personal history. Her lab partner Bill [is] a character every bit as extraordinary as any of the wild

organisms she describes... Jahren is determined we stop taking trees for granted: so plant one tree this year, she implores. Trees nourish life in uncountable, always beautiful, ways, and to plant one is to plant hope.” — Melissa Holbrook Pierson, *The New York Times Book Review*

“Engrossing... Vladimir Nabokov once observed that ‘a writer should have the precision of a poet and the imagination of a scientist.’ The geobiologist Hope Jahren possesses both in spades. Her new memoir is at once a thrilling account of her discovery of her vocation and a gifted teacher’s road map to the secret lives of plants—a book that, at its best, does for botany what Oliver Sacks’s essays did for neurology, what Stephen Jay Gould’s writings did for paleontology... By crosscutting between chapters about the life cycle of trees and flowers and other green things, and chapters about her own coming-of-age as a scientist, Jahren underscores the similarities between humans and plants—tenacity, inventiveness, an ability to adapt—but, more emphatically, the radical otherness of plants... [In] the laboratory of her father, who taught introductory physics and earth science at a local community college, she discovered the rituals and magic of science: She embraced its rules and procedures and the attention to detail it demanded. Science gave her what she needed: ‘a home as defined in the most literal sense, a safe place to be’... She communicates the electric excitement of discovering something new—something no one ever knew or definitively proved before—and the grunt work involved in conducting studies and experiments: the days and weeks and months of watching and waiting and gathering data, the all-nighters, the repetitions, the detours, both serendipitous and unfruitful... Along the way, she comes to realize that her work as a scientist is also part of a larger enterprise: she is part of the continuum of scientists who have each built upon their predecessors’ work, and who will hand down their own advances to the next generation.” — Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

“Deeply affecting . . . a totally original work, both fierce and uplifting: a biologist’s natural history of her subjects, and herself. In *Lab Girl*, pioneering geobiologist Jahren limns her journey [from] insecure young scientist [to] medals and professional and personal fulfillment. Jahren recognized as an undergrad that science would be her true home—a place of safety, warmth, and light [where] she could be part of something larger than herself. A belletrist in the mold of Oliver Sacks, she is terrific at showing just how science is done. But her prose reaches another dimension when she describes her remarkable relationship with a lab guy, an undergraduate loner named Bill. The research partners dig holes, gather soil samples, battle personal demons, and keep each other grounded. Jahren’s writing is precise, as befits a scientist who also loves words. She’s an acute observer, prickly—and funny as hell.” —Elizabeth Royte, *ELLE*

From the Penguin Random House website