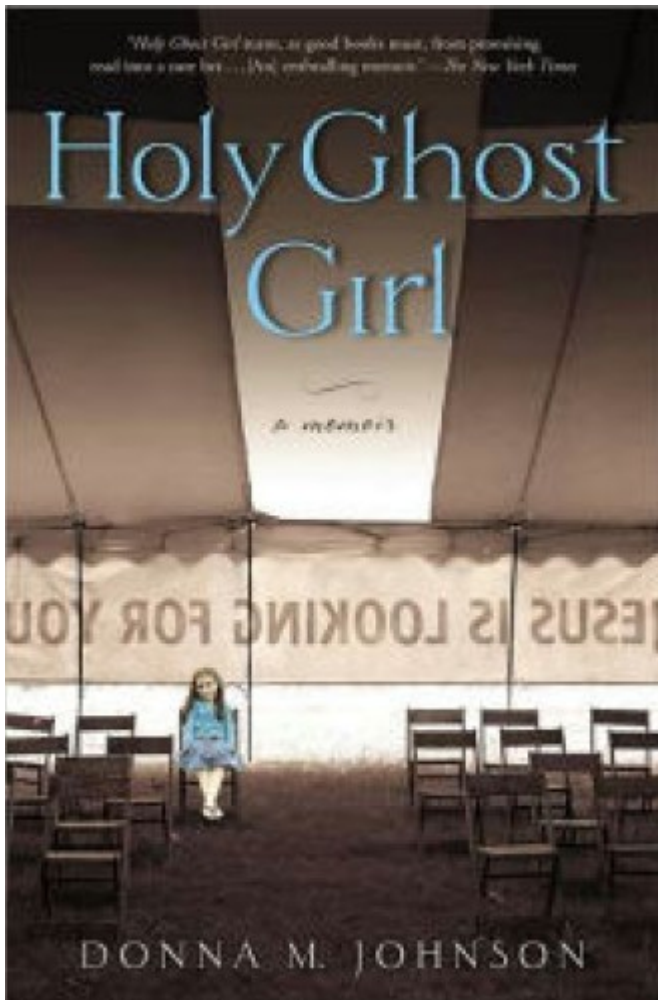


Debra Bendis's Christmas picks

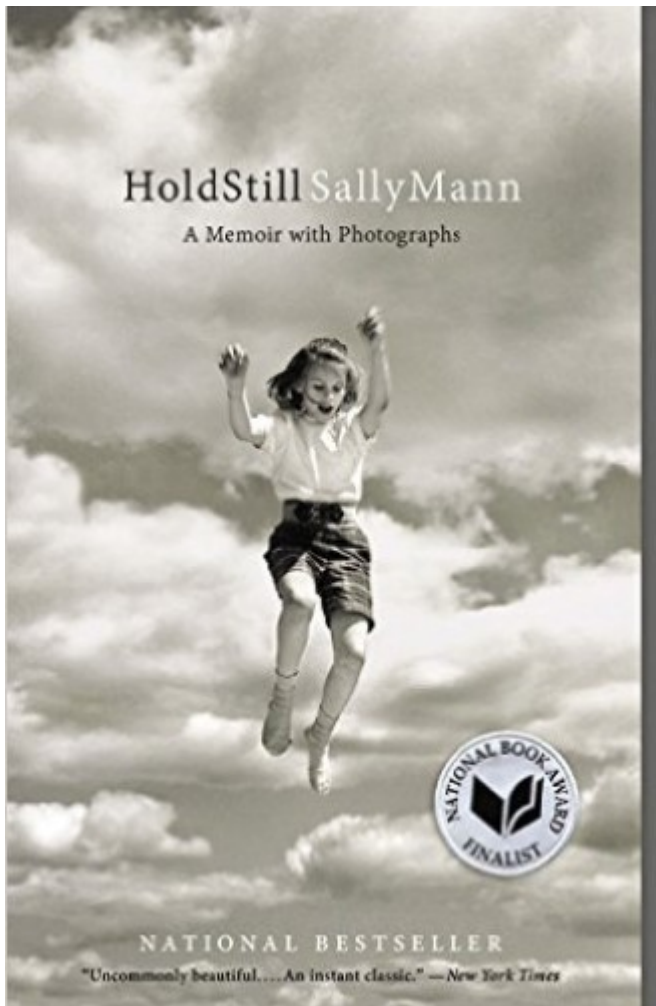
selected by [Debra Bendis](#) in the [December 7, 2016](#) issue

In Review



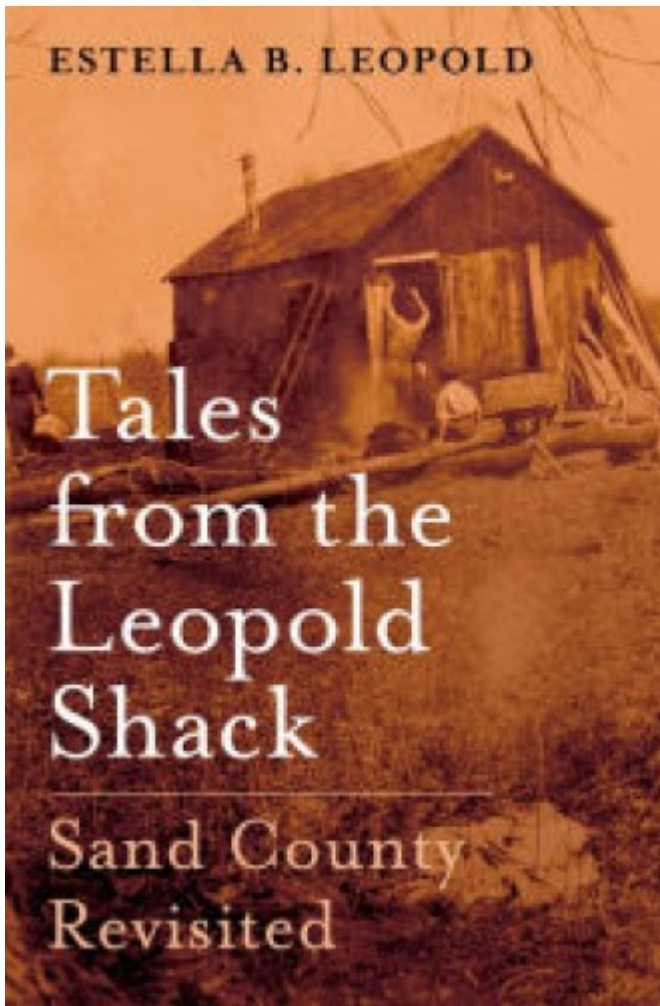
Holy Ghost Girl

by Donna M. Johnson
Avery



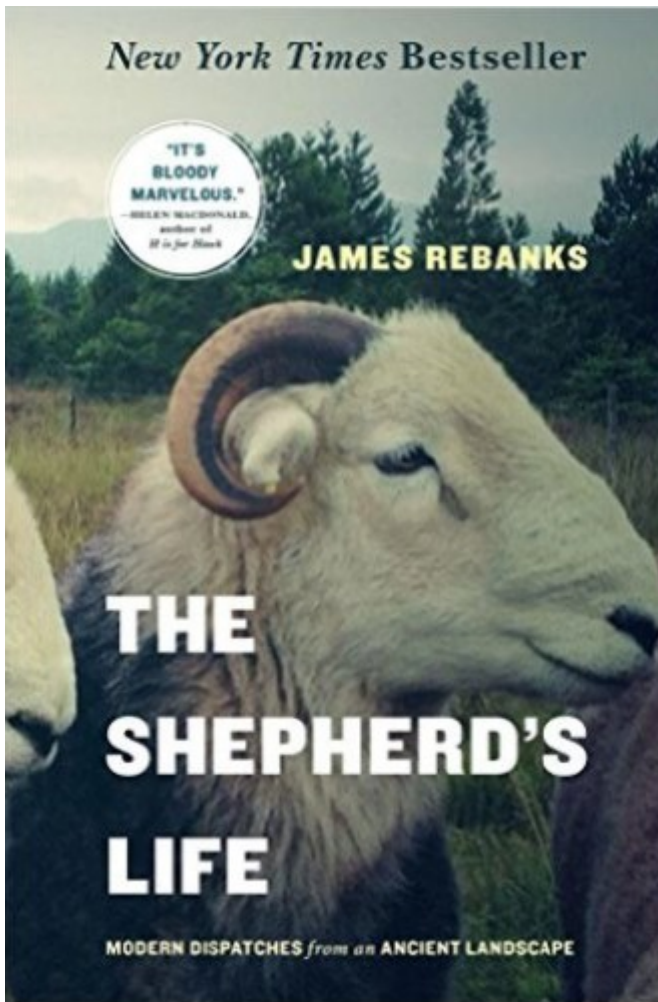
Hold Still

by Sally Mann
Little, Brown



Stories from the Leopold Shack

by Estella B. Leopold
Oxford University Press



The Shepherd's Life

by James Rebanks

Flatiron Books

Donna M. Johnson's *Holy Ghost Girl* (Avery) stands out from an abundance of memoirs on "leaving fundamentalism." Johnson survived the off-and-on presence of her mother, who fell in love with a manipulative Holy Roller preacher, played the organ for him at tent revivals, and eventually married him. Her memoir reflects an honest, bone-deep, and ongoing effort to come to terms with her past without losing her love for family or abandoning her faith.

In *Hold Still: A Memoir with Photographs* (Little, Brown), renowned photographer Sally Mann supplements her storytelling skill with photos of friends (including artist Cy Twombly) and family in the 1970s at their Virginia farm (including some of the infamous shots of her children nude) and other works from her photography

exhibits.

In *Stories from the Leopold Shack: Sand County Revisited* (Oxford University Press), Estella B. Leopold, the youngest daughter of Aldo Leopold, reflects on her family's love for a vacation shack in south-central Wisconsin, and for everything in the natural world. The family of five rebuilt the shack, planted trees, mastered birdcalls, hunted with bow and arrow, and sang together in the evenings. The family dynamic is worth mention: all five children grew up to be scientists, and as adults, each built their own wilderness shack.

My favorite book of the year is *The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from an Ancient Landscape* (Flatiron Books), by James Rebanks. It was a hit in the U.K. last year and has just appeared in the United States. A book about sheep, you ask skeptically? I thought the same thing, but the muscle and beauty of this man's writing pulled me in and back through six centuries of shepherding lore and knowledge and through the seasons of this shepherd's life in his beloved Lake District highlands.

Read the other 2016 Christmas picks [here](#).