



The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir

By Bill Bryson

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The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir By Bill Bryson

From one of the world's most beloved writers and *New York Times* bestselling author of *One Summer*, a vivid, nostalgic, and utterly hilarious memoir of growing up in the 1950s

Bill Bryson was born in the middle of the American century—1951—in the middle of the United States—Des Moines, Iowa—in the middle of the largest generation in American history—the baby boomers. As one of the best and funniest writers alive, he is perfectly positioned to mine his memories of a totally all-American childhood for 24-carat memoir gold. Like millions of his generational peers, Bill Bryson grew up with a rich fantasy life as a superhero. In his case, he ran around his house and neighborhood with an old football jersey with a thunderbolt on it and a towel about his neck that served as his cape, leaping tall buildings in a single bound and vanquishing awful evildoers (and morons)—in his head—as "The Thunderbolt Kid."

Using this persona as a springboard, Bill Bryson re-creates the life of his family and his native city in the 1950s in all its transcendent normality—a life at once completely familiar to us all and as far away and unreachable as another galaxy. It was, he reminds us, a happy time, when automobiles and televisions and appliances (not to mention nuclear weapons) grew larger and more numerous with each passing year, and DDT, cigarettes, and the fallout from atmospheric testing were considered harmless or even good for you. He brings us into the life of his loving but eccentric family, including affectionate portraits of his father, a gifted sportswriter for the local paper and dedicated practitioner of isometric exercises, and of his mother, whose job as the home furnishing editor for the same paper left her little time for practicing the domestic arts at home. The many readers of Bill Bryson's earlier classic, *A Walk in the Woods*, will greet the reappearance in these pages of the immortal Stephen Katz, seen hijacking literally boxcar loads of beer. He is joined in the Bryson gallery of immortal characters by the demonically clever Willoughby brothers, who apply their scientific skills and can-do attitude to gleefully destructive ends.

Warm and laugh-out-loud funny, and full of his inimitable, pitch-perfect observations, *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid* is as wondrous a book

as Bill Bryson has ever written. It will enchant anyone who has ever been young.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Though billed as memoir, Bryson's follow-up to *A Short History of Nearly Everything* can only be considered one in the broadest sense. Sure, it's filled with Bryson's recollections of his Des Moines, Iowa, childhood. But it's also a clear foray into Jean Shepherd territory, where nostalgia for one's youth is suffused with comic hyperbole: "All sneakers in the 1950s had over seven dozen lace holes," we're told; though all the toys were crummy, it didn't matter because boys had plenty of fun throwing lit matches at each other; and mimeograph paper smelled wonderful. The titular Thunderbolt Kid is little more than a recurring gag, a self-image Bryson invokes to lash out at the "morons" that plague every child's existence. At other times, he offers a glib pop history of the decade, which works fine when discussing teen culture or the Cold War but falls flat when trying to rope in the Civil Rights movement. And sometimes he just wants to reminisce about his favorite TV shows or the Dick and Jane books. The book is held together by sheer force of personality—but when you've got a personality as big as Bryson's, sometimes that's enough. (Oct. 17)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—The Thunderbolt Kid was born in the 1950s when six-year-old Bryson found a mysterious, scratchy green sweater with a satiny thunderbolt across the chest. The jersey bestowed magic powers on the wearer—X-ray vision and the power to zap teachers and babysitters and deflect unwanted kisses from old people. These are the memoirs of that Kid, whose earthly parents were not really half bad—a loving mother who didn't cook and was pathologically forgetful, but shared her love of movies with her youngest child, and a dad who was the greatest baseball writer that ever lived and took his son to dugouts and into clubhouses where he met such famous players as Stan Musial and Willie Mays. Simpler times are conveyed with exaggerated humor; the author recalls the middle of the last century in the middle of the country (Des Moines, IA), when cigarettes were good for you, waxy candies were considered delicious, and kids were taught to read with Dick and Jane. Students of the decade's popular culture will marvel at the insular innocence described, even as the world moved toward nuclear weapons and civil unrest. Bryson describes country fairs and fantastic ploys to maneuver into the tent to see the lady stripper, playing hookey, paper routes, church suppers, and more. His reminiscences will entertain a wide audience.—*Jackie Gropman, Chantilly Regional Library, Fairfax County, VA*

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Bill Bryson (*A Short History of Nearly Everything*, **** July/Aug 2003) clearly has a great deal of fun recalling and judiciously exaggerating stories from his youth. Reviewers particularly enjoy his focus on the good times, his fondness for his parents, and his ability to find the humor in such dry topics as defense spending. Those who have experienced the 1950s or the Midwest will find a great deal to appreciate about Bryson's reminiscences; those who haven't will still get most of the jokes, many of which rely on such universal (if not universally appreciated) sources of humor as cheap candy, the elderly, and flatulence.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Kevin Burkes:

The e-book with title The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir includes a lot of information that you can learn it. You can get a lot of gain after read this book. This particular book exist new expertise the information that exist in this reserve represented the condition of the world today. That is important to you to learn how the improvement of the world. This particular book will bring you throughout new era of the global growth. You can read the e-book with your smart phone, so you can read that anywhere you want.

Homer Anderson:

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