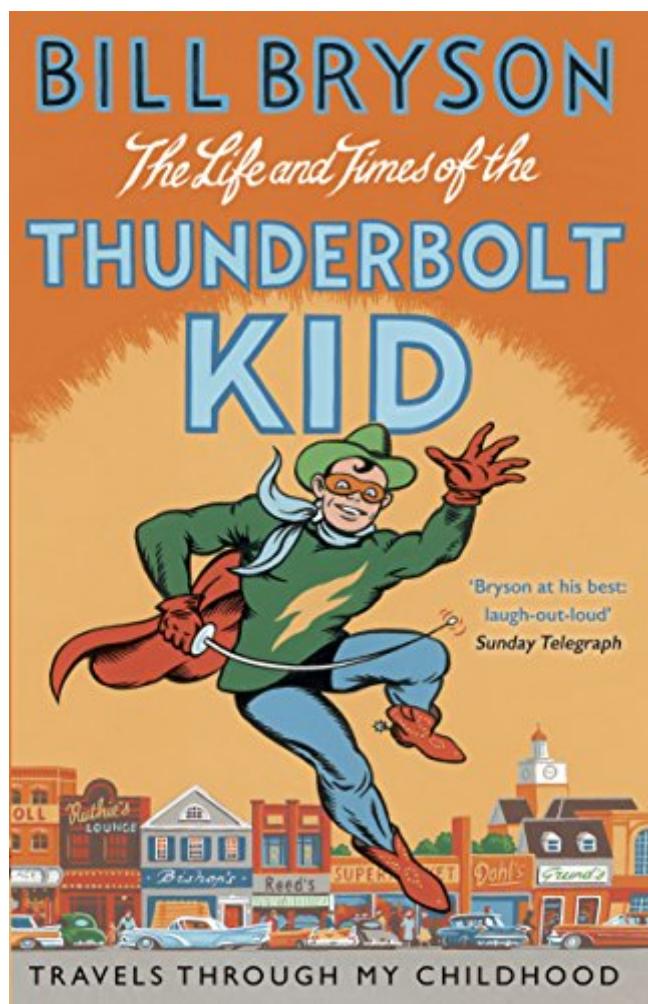


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The Life And Times Of The Thunderbolt Kid: Travels Through My Childhood (Bryson)



Synopsis

Bill Bryson's first travel book opened with the immortal line, "I come from Des Moines. Somebody had to." In this deeply funny and personal memoir, he travels back in time to explore the ordinary kid he once was, in the curious world of 1950s Middle America. It was a happy time, when almost everything was good for you, including DDT, cigarettes and nuclear fallout. This is a book about one boy's growing up. But in Bryson's hands, it becomes everyone's story, one that will speak volumes especially to anyone who has ever been young.

Book Information

File Size: 2782 KB

Print Length: 290 pages

Publisher: Transworld Digital (January 23, 2010)

Publication Date: March 2, 2010

Language: English

ASIN: B0035OC7RW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #134,244 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #50
in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Regional U.S. > Midwest #932 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers #1851 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Memoirs

Customer Reviews

Any Baby Boomer who thinks fondly on a childhood in the 1950s will enjoy this book immensely. Born in 1951 and raised in Des Moines, Iowa, Bill Bryson had what we might consider the average middle-class life in the geographic center of America. As such, it's easy for us to nod in agreement at many of the details he recalls: spider-web-like strands of airplane glue that stuck to everything except small plastic model pieces; the confusion of having two different actors play the Lone Ranger on TV; the stilted and unrealistic conversations we read in our Dick and Jane textbooks; and the fact that we all spent our free time outside, making up our own games. Bryson additionally got into a few unusual scrapes with some of his neighborhood buddies, and the distance of time makes each one

of their escapades a real hoot. Those post-war days were indeed the best of times and the worst of times. The nation grew wealthy and happier and stronger, and technological advances like television made us feel more powerful. Simultaneously the Cold War intensified, and we grew ever more fearful of a nuclear attack from Russia. It was a unique and great time to be a kid."Happily," Bryson writes, "we were indestructible. We didn't need seat belts, air bags, smoke detectors, bottled water, or the Heimlich maneuver. We didn't require child-safety caps on our medicines. We didn't need helmets when we rode our bikes or pads for our knees and elbows when we went skating. We knew without a written reminder that bleach was not a refreshing drink and that gasoline when exposed to a match had a tendency to combust.

Bill Bryson was born in 1951 in Des Moines, Iowa. Talk about lucky! "I can't imagine there has ever been a more gratifying time or place to be alive than America in the 1950s," he writes. "We became the richest country in the world without needing the rest of the world."And Billy Bryson --- white, Protestant, son of a brilliant sportswriter and the home furnishings editor of the Des Moines Register --- was in just the right place to take full advantage. As many of you know, Bryson grew up to live in England and write first class travel books --- *A Walk in the Woods*, his account of walking the Appalachian Trail with his out-of-shape friend, Steve Katz, is both informative and hilarious --- and serious studies of language, like Bryson's *Dictionary of Troublesome Words*. But as a kid, he was a pure doofus. He had no interest in school, his city's cultural institutions or its many opportunities for youth athletics. By the testimony of this memoir, Billy Bryson had only one childhood obsession: trouble. Namely, how much damage to property and civility could one fresh-faced boy --- and, of course, his posse of equally privileged homies --- do each and every day. And because kids roamed free in those days and time stretched to the horizon, Billy had all of Des Moines as his target. Exhibit A: He liked to hide on the top floor of an office building with a central atrium. Seven stories below was a restaurant: "A peanut M&M that falls seventy feet into a bowl of tomato soup makes one heck of a splash, I can tell you.

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