



The Life and times of the Thunderbolt Kid

By Bill Bryson

First published in 2006

Genre and Subject

Travel Writers—United States

Humour writing

Memoirs

Synopsis

From one of our most beloved and bestselling authors, a vivid, nostalgic, and utterly hilarious memoir of growing up in the 1950s. Born in 1951 in the middle of the United States, Des Moines, Iowa, Bill Bryson is perfectly positioned to mine his memories of a totally all-American childhood for 24 carat memoir gold. Like millions of his generation, Bryson grew up with a rich fantasy life as a superhero. In his case, he ran around the house wearing a jersey with a thunderbolt on it and a towel round his neck that served as his cape, leaping tall buildings in a single bound and vanquishing evildoers (in his head) as The Thunderbolt Kid.

Using his childhood fantasy life as a springboard, Bill Bryson recreates the life of his family in the 1950s in all its transcendent normality. In a period that saw the inexorable rise of television, the opening of Disneyland, the testing of the atomic bomb, and the explosion of choice in everything from food to cars, Bill Bryson's days followed in reassuringly cosy succession, enlivened by modest triumphs and disasters.

Warm and laugh-out-loud funny, *The Rise and Fall of the Thunderbolt Kid* is a modern classic, full of Bill Bryson's inimitable, pitch-perfect observations.

Author Biography

Bill Bryson was born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1951. His bestselling books include *The Road to Little Dribbling*, *Notes from a Small Island*, *A Walk in the Woods*, *One Summer* and *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*. In a national poll, *Notes from a Small Island* was voted the book that best represents Britain. His acclaimed work of popular science, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, won the Aventis Prize and the Descartes Prize, and was the biggest selling non-fiction book of its decade in the UK. His new book *The Body: A Guide for Occupants* is an extraordinary exploration of the human body which will have you marvelling at the form you occupy.

Bill Bryson was Chancellor of Durham University 2005–2011. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society. He lives in England.

Discussion Starters

Bill writes, "I can't imagine there has ever been a more gratifying time or place to be alive than American in the 1950s" (Chap. 1, p. 5). What does he mean by this? What evidence does he present in the book to back this statement up?

Describe the transformation that occurred in Des Moines during the 1950s and after. What changed about the city? How does Bill feel about the changes?

How was Bill's childhood different than what a child might experience today? What things have changed? What has remained the same?

Describe Bill's relationship with his father and mother. How did he feel about them? How did their personalities and interests shape Bill's?

What was childhood like for American children in the 1950s? What concerns and excitements did they have?

How did Bill become the Thunderbolt Kid? What did he add to the story and...

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