



The life and times of the Thunderbolt Kid

By Bill Bryson

First published in 2006

Genre & subject

Travel writers - United States

Humour writing

Memoirs

Synopsis

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 funniest writers alive, he is perfectly positioned to mine his all-American childhood for 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 neighbourhood wearing a jersey with a thunderbolt on it and a towel about his neck, vanquishing evildoers-in his head-as "The Thunderbolt Kid." Using his fantasy-life persona as a springboard, Bryson recreates the life of his family in the 1950s in all its transcendent normality, a life at once familiar to us all and as far away and unreachable as another galaxy.

Author biography

William McGuire "Bill" Bryson, born in 1951, is a best-selling American author of humorous books on travel, as well as books on the English language and science. Born in the United States, he was a resident of Britain for most of his adult life before returning to the U.S. in 1995. In 2003 Bryson moved back to Britain, living in the old rectory of Wrampingham, Norfolk, and served as chancellor of Durham University from 2005 through 2011.

Bryson shot to prominence in the United Kingdom with the publication of *Notes from a Small Island* (1995), an exploration of Britain, and its accompanying television series. He received widespread recognition again with the publication of *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (2003), a book widely acclaimed for its accessible communication of science.

Discussion starters

- Bryson paints the 50's as an innocent, almost idyllic time. Was it?
- Does the childhood Bryson describes take place in a lost America? He paints a rich portrait of community ties and identity. To what degree do those ties still exist? What has been lost? Consider the effects of TV and the computer.
- Discuss Bryson's mother, a professional woman, and his father, who was also absent a good deal of the time. How did their manner of parenting strike you? Do we have a different concept of parenting today?

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