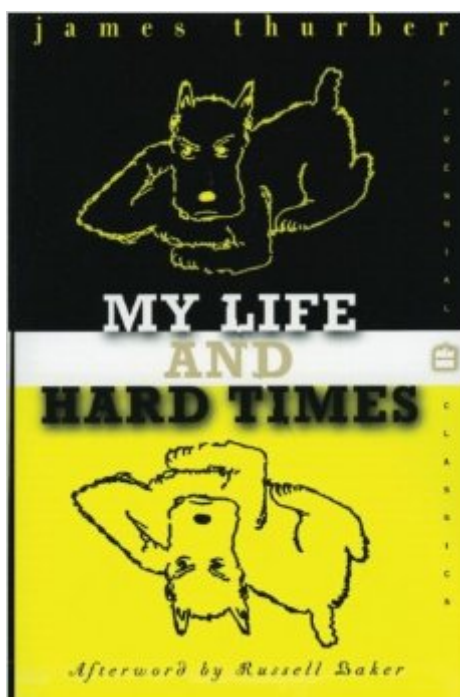


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My Life And Hard Times (Perennial Classics)



Synopsis

Widely hailed as one of the finest humorist of the twentieth century, James Thurber looks back at his own life growing up in Columbus, Ohio, with the same humor and sharp wit that defined his famous sketches and writings. In *My Life and Hard times*, first published in 1933, he recounts the delightful chaos and frustrations of family, boyhood, youth odd dogs, recalcitrant machinery, and the foibles of human nature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Other reviewers have said it before, but I feel the need to back them up even more: This book is a work of pure genius and originality. I was lucky enough to discover James Thurber while in the 8th grade, after flipping ahead in my English book and reading "The Car We Had To Push." A year later, I stumbled across copies of this book and "The Thurber Carnival" (an anthology of all his books) at a Harper Collins discount book sale. I consider this book to be the greatest deal of my life, since I purchased it for fifty cents and now feel that I would have done the same if it had been fifty dollars instead. *My Life and Hard Times* is only a quarter of an inch thick, disguising the awesome amount of humor it contains. When I packed for college, this was the first book to accompany me on my journey, and I still reread it once or twice a month. The stories can be enjoyed on their own, but when combined into a biography such as this, the realization that Thurber can take the most ordinary-seeming events in life and turn them into a riot of laughter. It almost makes *me* wish for a

family as interesting as he makes his own out to be. The stories provide a good dose of nostalgia for those who remember life in the early twentieth century, but for the rest of us, it's a treat to hear the stories through the eyes of someone who lived through it. I'll stop gushing about how much I absolutely adore this title and leave you with the best advice I can give: BUY THIS BOOK, and treasure it.

James Thurber actually does tell something of the story of his life in this famed biography, but mostly he just moseys along telling stories with his trademark dry, mopey wit. The very first chapter--"The Night the Bed Fell"--begins with the laconic observation, "I suppose that the high-water mark of my youth in Columbus, Ohio, was the night the bed fell on my father." Thurber goes on to explain how his grandmother felt that electricity leaked if not plugged up, a preoccupation that kept her busy filling in every gap in every lamp or outlet in the house. All the chapters are pretty much entitled with the name of some highlight of Thurber's Ohio youth: "The Day the Dam Broke" and "The Night the Ghost Got In" and that sort of thing. What the chapters all have in common is that Thurber is a brilliant storyteller who manages to make the most plebian, everyday happenings matters of sparkling humor.

In *My Life and Hard Times*, James Thurber depicts the idiosyncrasies of human beings with a unique and humorous autobiography that diverts the reader and helps them to laugh at life. In a personal collection of stories such as "The Day the Dam Broke" and "The Night the Ghost Got In," Thurber rambles conversationally about his youth the early 1900s, keeping away from politics and big events and instead focusing on the "little perils of routine living" that pepper the lives of the ordinary people. By describing ridiculous events such as an entire town fleeing from a nonexistent flood, Thurber points out humans' lack of common sense and the foolishness that results. His short anecdotes help the reader not only to laugh at the characters and events in his book, but also at the reader's own life. However, Thurber finds no fault with people, instead laughing good naturedly and accepting them as a part of life. Memorable characters, ranging from Thurber's often insane grandfather to a slew of unique housemaids, add humor to the stories with their zany antics. The author's scribbled illustrations, scattered throughout the novel, increase the informal atmosphere. James Thurber's distinctive autobiography is an entertaining, if brief, read. Its frank and humorous look at the silliness of people's lives is fun to read silently, but makes, as Thurber says, "a better recitation."

This is a fantastic book: short, sweet, delightful, and heart-warming in its sheer simplicity and outrageousness. James Thurber is very straight-forward -- tells it how it was -- and that alone is potent enough to spark an eruption of laughter. However, "My Life and Hard Times" leaves nothing to be desired for personal want of the author's own cherry on top of his account. Thurber renders his childhood memories with such grace and elegance as to leave you spellbound upon completing it, and never tarnishes it with witty comments of spite or exaggeration. This will take you but an evening to complete, but it's definitely worth purchasing!

Unlike most autobiographies, *My Life and Hard Times* is short and extremely sweet. Despite its length, however, you can pick it up again and again and always be delighted by it. As Thurber says, he talks "largely about small matters and smally about great affairs." And the great affairs he talks about are quite meaningful, adding yet another dimension to the book. After reading it, I had the feeling James Thurber was somewhat depressed because of the limits of life. He only hints at this at the beginning and end of the book in his "Preface to a Life" and "A Note at the End," but it is there, and it is powerful. As for the nine anecdotes that make up the bulk of the book, there is simply no equal: they are very funny, displaying the occasional and humorous insanity of people. This is a book to be read again and again, and to be treasured.

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