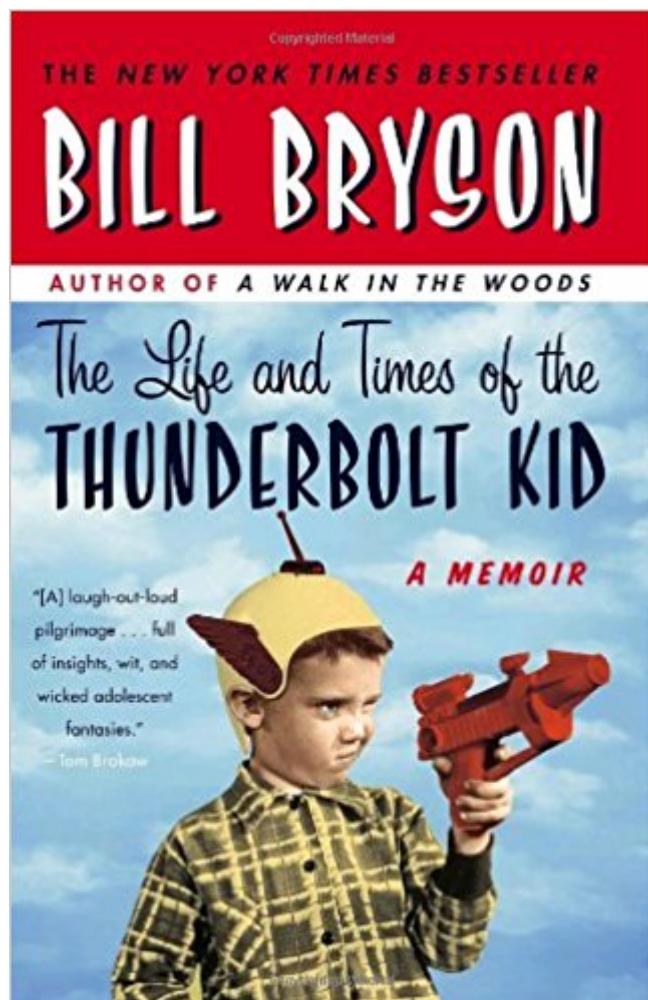


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# The Life And Times Of The Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## 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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