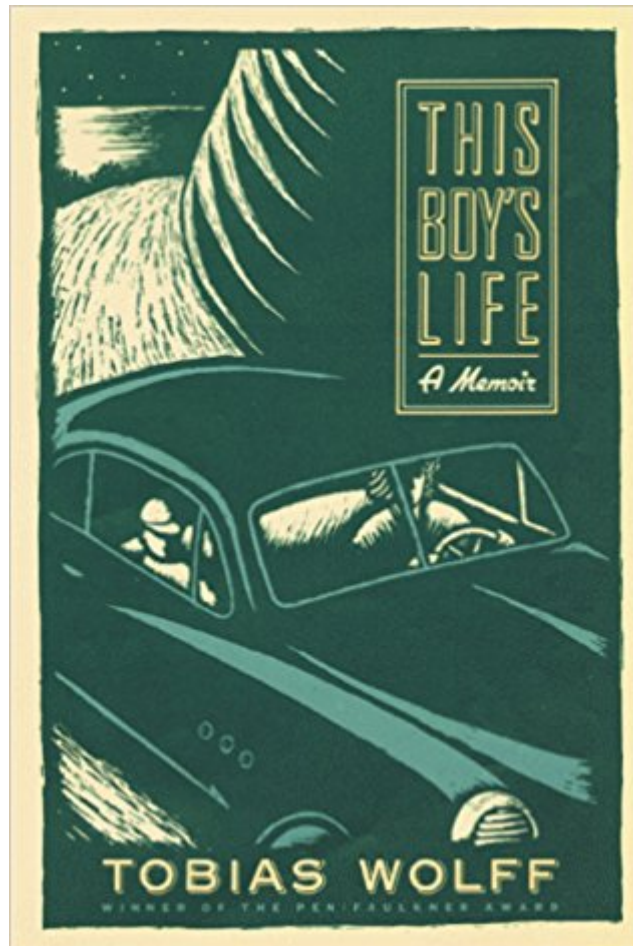




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This Boy's Life: A Memoir



Synopsis

This unforgettable memoir, by one of our most gifted writers, introduces us to the young Toby Wolff, by turns tough and vulnerable, crafty and bumbling, and ultimately winning. Separated by divorce from his father and brother, Toby and his mother are constantly on the move, yet they develop an extraordinarily close, almost telepathic relationship. As Toby fights for identity and self-respect against the unrelenting hostility of a new stepfather, his experiences are at once poignant and comical, and Wolff does a masterful job of re-creating the frustrations and cruelties of adolescence. His various schemes - running away to Alaska, forging checks, and stealing cars - lead eventually to an act of outrageous self-invention that releases him into a new world of possibility.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fiction writer Tobias Wolff electrified critics with his scarifying 1989 memoir, which many deemed as notable for its artful structure and finely wrought prose as for the events it describes. The story is pretty grim: Teenaged Wolff moves with his divorced mother from Florida to Utah to Washington State to escape her violent boyfriend. When she remarries, Wolff finds himself in a bitter battle of wills with his abusive stepfather, a contest in which the two prove to be more evenly matched than might have been supposed. Deception, disguise, and illusion are the weapons the young man learns to employ as he grows up--not bad training for a writer-to-be. Somber though this tale of family strife is, it is also darkly funny and so artistically satisfying that most readers come away exhilarated rather than depressed. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In PEN/Faulkner Award-winner Wolff's fourth book, he recounts his coming-of-age with customary skill and self-assurance. Seeking a better life in the Northwestern U.S. with his divorced mother, whose "strange docility, almost paralysis, with men of the tyrant breed" taught Wolff the virtue of rebellion, he considered himself "in hiding," moved to invent a private, "better" version of himself in order to rise above his troubles. Primary among these were the adultsdroolly eccentric, sometimes dementedwho were bent on humiliating him. Since Wolff the writer never pities Wolff the boy, the author characterizes the crew of grown-up losers with damning objectivity, from the neurotic stepfather who painted his entire house (piano and Christmas tree included) white, to the Native American football star whose ultimate failure was as inexplicable as his athletic brilliance. Briskly and candidly reportedWolff's boyhood best friend "bathed twice a day but always gave off an ammoniac hormonal smell, the smell of growth and anxiety"his youth yields a self-made man whose struggle to fit the pieces together is authentic and endearing. Literary Guild alternate. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tobias Wolff is sure that "everything was going to change when we got out West." And so the boy tags along on the peregrinations of his adventuresome mother. Her intention is to find peace within herself, and a place for herself and her son within a wider world equally intent on allowing them anything but that. Autobiographical, gritty realism, and wonderful story-telling. Lacks the bravado, the self-importance, and the claustrophobia of the usual coming-of-age novel. Spare, naive, irreverent, haunting: the devastatingly lonely, yet hopeful, journey of a boy on the road to becoming a man, even if accidentally. This was my first book by Wolff. He now has five on my shelf.

Wolff seemed to have so little going for him: no real home life, no guidance or stability, no strong foundation for a sense of self. Yet, he ultimately gained well-earned recognition as a great writer. I suspect the act of writing -- the desire to make sense of a chaotic world through honest analysis of emotion-- served to save and sustain him in life. This is a tough, well-written memoir.

I love memoirs, but this one was kind of hard for me to get through. I didn't find Tobias to be very likable as a youth. He seemed to be a liar and a trouble maker. I do feel for him because he was definitely mistreated by his step father, and maybe he acted out because of that. But overall, I didn't find myself cheering for the writer as I normally do with memoirs. I liked the writing style but the story

itself was hard for me.

This book provides a wealth of information about the early life of the author. He is open, honest and straightforward about his struggles and his achievements, as well as the actions for which he has remorse. The only reason I gave 4 instead of 5 stars, is that although he does an exemplary job of fleshing out a portrait of his younger self, he leaves the other characters in his life story lacking depth and nuance. All in all, I enjoyed this book and would say that it is well worth the read.

Tobias Wolff's memoir is about a boy's search for his true identity by trying on a number of personae. The reader also gets some interesting insights to his divorced mother and her complex personality. Tobias starts his journey to self-discovery by demanding that he be called "Jack", not Toby, because Jack sounds more macho, more like a guy, or even a dangerous rake. His mother Rosemary seldom forbids Jack anything; and when she tries to put her foot down, she's overruled by the loser men in her life, most notably and comically pathetic: Dwight. Jack tries every role from juvenile delinquent to cigarette-smoking, gambling Boy Scout. No kidding! The book is a page-turner without the cheap thrills, unless you count his sneaking home from school at around age 11 to "play" with the 22 one of Rosemary's boyfriends gave him. He aims at people on the street with the empty rifle. The game is no fun with an unloaded rifle, so he gets his ammo and is back to the apartment window aiming at people below. This is my second read of the book which I selected for an American Lit student studying memoirs. I'm sure this one has very high interest for all ages.

Not often I read a book in one sitting but this one did it for me. My type of book indeed.

Great memoir by a fine writer

This book was a fantastic read! I own and have seen the movie based on this memoir more times than I can count. The movie is one of my all time favorites, so when I saw this recommendation I thought I'd give it a try. It was great reading what really happened in Toby's life. It does differ quite a bit from the movie, but that happens most of the time. The book was written in a way that is easy to follow and understand, and it is just such a great story of trials and tribulations someone can go through and overcome. I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys autobiography's or even just the movie!

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