



As Time Goes By

W. Royce Adams

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Entertaining tales are gathered in the novel As Time Goes By, in which an octogenarian reviews colorful events from across his long life.

In W. Royce Adams's novel *As Time Goes By*, an older man reminisces to determine what his life's purpose has been.

Tongue-in-cheek and conversational, Old draws from quotations to set forth his aims: to remember his past and have fun telling a "whale story without the whale." From this bemused stance, and asking his listeners not to expect much, he shares a chronological series of stories from his past, recalling incidents and people with aplomb. Beginning with a photograph of a 1930s rocking horse, Old's childhood impressions morph into adult musings about why certain memories persist.

The vignettes include a road trip with Old's parents during which they saw a lynched man in passing; it is used to express his bewilderment about violence but also to appreciate the comfort he took from his father's reassurances that not everyone in the South held the same views. And during a summer spent with Old's grandfather, a "hedonistic sinner," Old's adolescent thrills are tamped by Christian religious guilt and overheard family disagreements.

Old's teenage years are covered in a mix of commonplace crushes, friendships, and dares surrounding a dangerous swimming hole, though they're improved by self-aware humor. At a boy's camp, he endures group rituals, defies a bully, contends with growing feelings of unworthiness, and has a moment of recognition. Elsewhere, his sexual awakening is marked by clumsiness that he addresses only in passing, sparking empathy.

The book's cheerful tone persists even through its more serious moments, as when Old joins the navy to preempt being sent to Korea in the army. Further, pivotal moments within these sketches are often consequential only in the moment: most have minimal impact on the larger story. Old's personal changes are subtle and quiet too.

Charming period details are mixed into the book's background, integrated via musical references and the fleeting acknowledgement of changing car models and advertisements. Old expresses appreciation for jazz; he takes up writing for magazines. But the events of his life tumble forward in too rapid succession: he recalls his marriage, his divorce, and its aftermath with speed, for example, and with little reflection. In their brevity and glancing nature, his tales amount to mere curiosities from a long life. Impulsivity guides him, and his narration becomes discursive, winding into old age, loss, and cancer. He comes to a sobering realization: the sum of a worthy but ordinary life is unfathomable.

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KAREN RIGBY (December 16, 2022)

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