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Andrew Collins was born 37 years ago in Northampton. His parents never split up, in fact they rarely exchanged a cross word. No-one abused him. Nobody died. He got on well with his brother and sister and none of his friends drowned in a canal. He has never stayed overnight in a hospital and has no emotional scars from his upbringing, except a slight lingering resentment that Anita Barker once mocked the stabilisers on his bike. *Where Did It All Go Right?* is a jealous memoir written by someone who occasionally wishes life had dealt him a few more juicy marketable blows. The author delves back into his first 18 years in search of something - anything - that might have left him deeply and irreparably damaged. With tales of bikes, telly, sweets, good health, domestic harmony and happy holidays, Andrew aims to bring a little hope to all those out there living with the emotional after-effects of a really nice childhood. Andrew Collins kept a diary from the age of five, so he really can remember what he had for tea everyday and what he did at school, excerpts from his diary run throughout the book and it is this detail which makes his story so compelling.

Where Did It All Go Right?: Growing Up Normal in the 70s Details

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From Reader Review Where Did It All Go Right?: Growing Up Normal in the 70s for online ebook

Julie says

I enjoyed this book at the beginning, as I also grew up in Northampton in the 70's and it brought back many lovely memories, of places and products which I had completely forgotten about. Funny how we all had a field that we used to play in and how we could stay out all day without any one worrying about us! At the time Northampton was a sleepy, shoe making town where nothing much happened it suddenly became designated as an overflow town for a growing London population and all our fields and play areas disappeared under housing sites, factories and other industries moved here along with a large amount of cockneys! I particularly identified with the beginning of the punk movement when we all spiked our hair and had multiple piercing and got our clothes from the Oxfam shop and thought we were the bee's knees. Then it was out with Punk and we all became New Romantics ! The truth also that we had to travel to Birmingham and Leicester to see any decent groups, and going ice skating each week meant travelling either to silver blades in Birmingham or Solihull. The book then began to wear a bit as it just seemed to be the authors diary published day after day with copious foot notes to explain everything. It's probably a book to dip in and out of rather than read in one go.

Catherine says

As someone a mere few months younger than the author who also had to go to Solihull to fall over on ice this was a real nostalgia fest. While there were some fairly substantial differences in our personal circumstances, not least that of gender, this book evoked the culture and feel of a childhood and adolescence that I'd remembered with different (although no less happy) emphases and so was continually reminding me of things I'd not quite forgotten: food, television programmes, music, a child's view of events and so on. Who says biographies of ordinary people only become fascinating with the passage of hundreds of years? I think this book proves that everyone's tale has value if it is well and honestly told.

Tim says

I think my biggest take away from this nostalgia fest is that many of the modern anxieties we have about food, exercise, safety and children didn't exist back in the 70s and 80s. Kids ate bacon and eggs for breakfast, sausages for lunch, potato chip sandwiches for dinner and filled the gaps in between with additive enriched sweets and snacks. There were no helicopter parents organizing every moment of a child's life, from carefully calibrated diet to an education road map. And yet, in spite of this, a successful generation of children grew up in relatively good health.

Of course they had different anxieties back then: nuclear annihilation, keeping up appearances, oil embargoes, homosexuality. It seems that humans simply have a propensity to worry, and we'll always find something to fill the emptiness of a comfortable life.

Juliana Graham says

Even though I'm a bit younger than Andrew and really grew up in the 80s rather than the 70s, I was still able to find quite a few familiar references in this book which I found quite amusing. I liked the fact that Andrew kept a diary from such a young age and so had a good basis to start from in his autobiography and I think he's captured the drama of life as a child or teenager quite well. I'll probably read *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now* at some point as I think I'll be able to relate to that even more AND *That's Me In The Corner* as I like his style of writing.

Nancy says

I read this because Neil H. reviewed it on his blog some years ago, describing it as the antidote to the popular memoirs of miserable childhoods à la Dave Peltzer. Neil pointed me to the audiobook version and I'm a little sorry I didn't get that because I would have enjoyed the author's voice. His British accent is much better and more authentic than the one in my head. But the book was a very entertaining and surprisingly nostalgic read. We grew up at the same time, in the late sixties and all of the seventies, in stable, happy families, in monocultural suburban neighborhoods, played outdoors unsupervised, watched tv, read lots of books, had artistic pursuits, and kept diaries. Reading excerpts from his diaries, until the teen years, was a lot like reading my own. Lots of material details were unfamiliar to me - the names of specific toys, tv shows, comic books, and snack foods, but I recognized the types. Almost like a parallel universe - what my life would have been like if I'd been born a continent away. And a boy. Close enough, though.

Richard says

Nowadays Andrew Collins is a journalist who writes about films and music, but when he was growing up he wanted to be an artist. One of the vehicles for his artistic aspirations was a diary that he kept from the age of 6 to 20.

This book is a memoir of a child growing up in a middle class family in the East Midlands, the eldest of three children. It sets out very deliberately to be an antidote to the 'Misery Memoirs' which have been inexplicably popular in the past. The back cover misquotes the Phillip Larkin poem:

'They tucked him up, his Mum and Dad'

The stories of growing up, playing out in the fields and working through the school is gently nostalgic. I'm three years younger than the author and I grew up in a provincial town in the West Midlands, so I shared many of the same formative experiences. Anyone of a similar age (probably from 40-60) who grew up in the UK would probably appreciate many of the stories told.

The structure of the book is simple, fluctuating between extracts from diaries, each covering a year. Obviously the style changes as the years pass, initially simple and endearing, passing through breathless excitable prose, and then moving into a sometimes irritating teen angst. The rest of the book is a series of musings related to the diary. These include thoughts on the slight insanity of having most of the important

exams that a child sits so that they coincide with the age when they are developing an interest in the opposite sex, learning to drive and discovering alcohol.

This is a very enjoyable book, and it really is an enjoyable alternative to those memoirs that tell of abusive childhoods.

Redfox5 says

I didn't grow up in the 70's but that didn't stop me enjoying this book. It had a lot of laugh out loud moments. And kids in the 70's did have some things in common with kids in the 90's. Well me and my sisters at least. Like my nan knitting clothes for my Barbie dolls (Andrews nan did it for action men), making bases, climbing trees, the fear of getting dog muck on your shoes. Mainly all the outside stuff. Major differences would be Andrews getting less Christmas presents and instead of him getting the films on video he would just get the books. However he did get to go to the cinema much more than I ever did. I liked the long chapters best. Some of the diary extracts are funny but I think there should have been much less of them. Reading about what someone had for dinner is not that exciting. Oh and having all the explanations in small print at the bottom was a bit rubbish. I kept losing my place after reading them.

Jemma says

As a fan of Collins and Maconie and having enjoyed Maconie's "Cider with Roadies", I looked forward to this book. Sadly, it is quite dull and repetitive. To be fair, this is flagged up by Collins' repeated admission that nothing really bad happened to him. He's not lying.

The other reason this is weak is that Collins' has split his story into three volumes. Something which is done a lot in both the Victorian eras and now with e-books, but which seems a little mercenary in a book from the early noughties. That is odd though, it doesn't fit with what is clearly a relaxed personality.

Nevertheless, this is a pleasant enough read and could well be invaluable for social historians of this era. There is much to recognise in his assessments of contemporary culture, which you'll probably like if you're around his age and which the historian could find useful. There is, however, little really new here that you haven't encountered in other nostalgia programmes/books. What makes this different is his frankness, for instance about the casual racism of the playground. More of that kind of thing would be wonderful, it's the amount of inconsequential and repetitious detail that surrounds this worthwhile kernel which lets this memoir down.

Faith says

Where Did It All Go Right? - Growing up normal in the 70s. Andrew Collins' memoirs of his normal nontraumatic childhood and teenage years in Northampton, smallish East Midlands town. An answer to all the McCourts, Pelzers and co. with their miserable childhoods.

And normal certainly doesn't mean boring. Before I started reading the book just thinking about it made me smile/laugh. Collins writes in a very funny/entertaining way, and I enjoyed every page of the book. My 70s

were the (glorious) 90s, but still I sometimes see my own childhood in this book. People who grew up in the same time, in the same country and are of the same gender as Collins are likely guaranteed to get loads more flashbacks of course. But I find also the differences interesting. The school system totally different to the Finnish one, the Action Man Games (in stead of the doll and Barbie ones), the 70s punk era... I hope somebody will write something like this about the 90s in about 10 years...

Ace book! ;)

Robert says

Really liked idea if this book. As around same age early stuff really nostalgic. Then he answered question he asked at start Why most books on childhood about bad experiences. The answer is normal is boring. This would score really low if I were 10 years older or younger

Godzilla says

I'm close to Andrew Collins age, if slightly behind him in years, and so could relate in many ways to this book.

I was raised in an even more provincial town, with no opportunities for convenient travel to cities or even large towns.

He put the trials and tribulations down on paper so well: it evoked many strong memories for me.

This may not grab you if you are from a different generation, but it does express beautifully the adolescent angst that boys go through.

I'm going to get my son to read it before his teenage years, just so he can appreciate the importance of not overreacting too much to those perceived slights and injustices.

I'm looking forward to the next installment: the student years, no doubt more painful/wonderful memories will be rekindled...

Tim Worthington says

As you'll no doubt be aware if you've ever seen any clip show ever, Andrew Collins has a phenomenal recall of the 'seventies'. Not just for details like fads and theme songs, but the surrounding ambience - the sights, sounds and sometimes even smells that swirled around street parties, seaside jaunts and rainy Bank Holiday visits to MFI. It's hardly surprising that he had the mental capacity to take all of this in as, well, nothing much remarkable happened to him. Until a fox stole him through a window, but that's another story.

Drawn from Andrew's own real-life diaries, *Where Did It All Go Right?* is an hilarious account of a normal, mundane, day-to-day childhood in a decade that everyone else seems to want to depict as either a catalogue of horrors or a catalogue of Spangles. There are classmates with hilariously bland nicknames, unintentionally

comic attempts at 'making your own entertainment', and an endless procession of all-consuming obsessions with the latest blockbusting films and, towards the end of the decade, TV series. It's also laudably upfront and undefensive about childhood flirtations with homophobia and what were at best racially dubious gags, accepting they were made in childhood innocence and ignorance but refusing to hide behind that, and the astonishingly confused diary entries about *Roots* ("ma favourite programme") are worth the price of admission alone. Especially if you Paid A Pound. Hang on, what was that in 'old money' again...?

Lara says

I absolutely bloody loved this book but I do have something of a weakness for male authors writing about their provincial upbringings. I particularly liked the premise that that not all books about growing up need to be 'Angela's Ashes'. It was also a relief that Andrew Collins' speaking voice did not echo in my ears as I read.

Cecily says

Amusing autobiography, supplemented by diary entries, of a lower? middle class boy (born 1965) growing up normal in Northampton, where/when nothing very extraordinary happened. Good, but publishing a second volume (*Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now*) is probably milking the idea too much.

It's interesting to compare this with two other memoir-ish books by relatively normal male Brits of the same generation:

David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green*
and
best of the three, Nigel Slater's *Toast*

Anthony Fisher says

I read the reviews before purchasing this book and was impressed. However, I have struggled to read it. Basically, I found it quite dull and disjointed. There are too many footnotes and it was not easy (to be fair, probably due to the small print of the book) to see the notations. This spoilt the flow of the book, with me constantly trying to link the footnote to the notation. Generally I think it wrong to use so many footnotes and in this case I feel the author could have simply added the contents of the footnote to the text of the passage. It did make the book harder to read. That all said I still found the book quite boring and for once I gave up reading it at about page 90. Maybe I stopped too soon and the meat of the book came later, but I am sorry I read for pleasure and this book became a task.
