



Sleepwalk With Me and Other Painfully True Stories

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Hello, I am Mike Birbiglia and I want you to read my book. Too on the nose? Sorry. Let me dial it back.

I'm Mike Birbiglia and I'm a comedian. You may know me from Comedy Central or *This American Life* or *The Bob & Tom Show*, but you've never seen me like this before.

Naked.

Wait, that's the name of another book. Also I'm not naked as there are no pictures in my book. Also, if there were naked pictures of me, you definitely wouldn't buy it, though you might sneak a copy into the back corner of the bookstore and show it to your friend and laugh. Okay, let's get off the naked stuff.

This is my first book. It's difficult to describe. It's a comedic memoir, but I'm only 32 years old so I'd hate for you to think I'm "wrapping it up," so to speak. But I tell some personal stories. Some REALLY personal stories. Stories that I considered not publishing time and time again, especially when my father said, "Michael, you might want to stay away from the personal stuff." I said, "Dad, just read the dedication." (Which I'm telling you to do too.)

Some of the stories are about my childhood, some are about girls I made out with when I was thirteen, some are about my parents, and some are, of course, about my bouts with sleepwalking. Bring this book to bed. And sleepwalk with me.

Sleepwalk With Me and Other Painfully True Stories Details

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Author : Mike Birbiglia

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From Reader Review Sleepwalk With Me and Other Painfully True Stories for online ebook

Rebecca says

I love Mike Birbiglia's stand-up, but this collection of essays (many which are jokes from his act) suddenly has more poignancy. His humor is so subtle (it helps when you are familiar with his delivery and style) and there were moments where I genuinely laughed out loud...in public. But it's when he discusses the hard moments of his life that he draws the reader in. I don't know of a good word to use for the funny, bittersweet feel of this book, but anybody who wants to feel their humanity, in all its aspects, should read this book

Fabian says

Although the comedic level plateaus between very amusing & giggle-worthy, its compulsive readability is reasonably high. The prose is better than the actual jokes, in other words. Mike Birbiglia speaks more from the realm of the personal (family & sleep disorders) than the professional. Still, very much worth your time.

Dawn says

This was funny. Sort of.

I liked it. Sort of.

I have to confess.. I liked the first half a lot better than the second half. I found it funnier, laughed out loud more.. The second half was ok, but I wasn't laughing as often, and I wasn't as drawn into it.. And there might just be a reason for that. How do I say this... I might have been slightly drunk when I read the first half of the book. I remember thinking it was so funny, definitely a four star rating.. And then the next day it was just.. I don't know. I was already endeared to it, but no longer drunk, so the funny was falling a little flat. But still, I'm going with three stars over all. I liked it. Nothing more, nothing less.

I recommend everyone read this while drinking.

Worst review ever. :)

Kater Cheek says

Mike Birbiglia is a funny guy. I've heard him on "This American Life" a couple of times, and he's a great comedian. He manages to make me laugh without resorting to racism, misogyny, or a surfeit of swear words, unlike many comedians. So when my friend lent me her book club's selection for last month, "Sleepwalk with Me: and Other Painfully True Stories" I was surprised to hear that the book club didn't like it.

So I went into this book with guarded expectations. After all, I'd already heard the eponymous story on a

podcast and found it both fascinating and hilarious. I also enjoy memoirs, though I'm a little burned out on the "my childhood was worse than your childhood" subgenre.

Here's the problem. If you went into this book with the idea that you were going to read a book about a sad loser who had a horrible childhood, and if you like that sort of "my childhood was worse than your childhood" subgenre, you might find this okay. You'd balk at the private-school snobbery, maybe (I grew up in the west, so when I hear people get derisive about "public schools" I assume that they have maids and nannies and their own pony and have never stepped foot inside a Wal-Mart, and are therefore not normal Americans.) You'd wonder why he never made anything of himself despite not being beaten regularly, or having a handicap, or growing up poor in Ireland, or whatever, but you might like to hear about someone who obviously thinks he had a worse childhood than you. You might even pity him.

The Mike Birbiglia in this novel is a sad, pathetic nobody who was never liked (and probably still isn't). His dad doesn't like him, his family kind of wishes he weren't around, and he hasn't got any friends. He's terrible at school, he's not good at sports either, and women don't even want to touch him. Mike Birbiglia, author, doesn't seem like the kind of guy I'd invite out for drinks. I wouldn't even want to sit next to him on the bus, for fear he would go on about himself.

And that's the problem. Because when I HEAR Birbiglia on the radio, he sounds like a great guy. He's funny, confident, and self-deprecating enough that I get the feeling that he's awesome, but still down-to-earth enough that you'd want to be friends with him. When he's speaking (which are often the EXACT SAME WORDS as from his stand-up routine) he sounds great. He's very funny. The timing is spot-on, the intonation classic. Mike Birbiglia, stand-up comedian, comes off as a great guy.

I can only think that this book is like a photograph of a very charming and attractive person who isn't photogenic at all. So much of what makes a person pretty is how they move, how they smile, their energy. When you get a static image, it doesn't always look as good as the person.

The paper version of this book, I'd only recommend to people who adore depressing memoirs. The audiobook version (if there is one, and if it's read by the author) I'd recommend to almost anyone.

Jason Paulios says

Love him on cd and on the radio but it just didn't translate so well onto the page. The jokes seemed calculating and occasionally lazy. They probably would work delivered orally but in a book the stories seemed rambling and too thin.

Rebecca says

I've been a huge fan of Mike Birbiglia, especially his segments on This American Life, and with the movie version of "Sleepwalk" about to hit theaters in my area, I wanted to follow my own rule of reading the book first.

This was a delightful read. Birbiglia combines poignancy and humor, my favorite combination on This American Life stories as well. For the most part, he is incredibly effective. I really did laugh out loud, which

is something I rarely do while reading. My favorite part was when he talked about his parents' first experiences with email and the internet -- still makes me giggle just thinking about it.

I still think these stories live better on the airwaves. I found myself missing Birbiglia's vocal inflections in the telling of them. Having said that, he did render the stories differently in writing than he did on the radio, particularly the title story "Sleepwalk with Me," where he includes more intimate relational details in the book than in the radio version, and I liked that.

There were just times in the middle of the book where he seemed to get swallowed up in the struggles of being a young comedian early in his career, and I found that I wasn't sure whether to laugh or cringe.

The end of the book provides a nice narrative arc of the other stories, and I'd highly recommend this as a fun, quick read. I think my generation, in particular, would love some of the references to emerging technology, as well as some of the pop culture that we've grown up with.

Can't wait to see the movie! It would definitely be an interesting genre study to see how the narrative has changed from live performance to radio to book to film.

Terry says

Eh. This book has that same fault as all other books by comedians (Samantha Bee's book is another such disappointment)---it's just a series of routines strung together in book form. There's almost no point to actually reading something like that; it would at least make sense to get the audiobook. I did chuckle out loud a few times, which is a compliment. But I felt that this book wasn't sure what it wanted to be--a memoir of his childhood? A memoir of his medical issue (based on the title, the opening, and some of the blurbs he includes at the end, it seems like he feels he shares this monumental experience and it's supposed to be the "point" of the book, but I did not feel it took up enough "space", so to speak, either in the book or his life as he shared it, to really BE the point of the book)? A memoir of breaking into the business? A series of stand-up routines strung together..? If it's supposed to be autobiographical, each section (childhood, Catholicism, his career) is so shallow it doesn't really justify being called a "memoir". Oh well.

Mike says

Sleepwalk with Me, Mike Birbiglia's purposeless and unfunny memoir, castrates his stand-up routine by putting it into the delivery-less medium of book form. Stand-up benefits by giving the impression of effortlessness; that is not so much the case here.

Most of *Sleepwalk with Me* deals less with 'painfully true' and more with painfully ordinary: distant dads, being picked on at school, discovering masturbation, that lousy summer job, realizing that Catholic belief is kind of silly, and let's not forget the inevitable piece about that awkward first sexual encounter. By the time Birbiglia runs through his checklist of white people "This American Life" problems (e.g. a bad trip to the beach after graduating from Georgetown), and gets to something a little bit more unique (his sleep disorder), it's impossible to remain engaged. How can such universal problems elicit next to no empathy?

Well, maybe it's the rampant self-pity. Does Birbiglia take the time in the book to respond personally to

quotes from a review in a *college newspaper*? From *years ago*!? The answer is, shamefully, yes; as a comic, he is willing to stoop to such levels of pettiness, not to mention his narcissistic tendency to check Google alerts of himself.

Beyond that, there's two outdated *Matrix* references, complaints about cell phones becoming too complicated, quotes of Mitch Hedberg jokes (which fall flat on the page, as stand-up routines are wont to do), and a cornucopia of cringe-inducing jokes. Here are some below for your perusal:

"Intrigued by the slurred headline, I continued. The story covered a widely discussed event on campus in which a drunk driver hit a drunk walker. I thought, *Hey, maybe these people shouldn't be making up holidays to drink more. Maybe if they drank less they might be able to title their newspaper articles more specifically.* For example, I would title this last article 'Drunk Driver Hits Drunk Walker Drunkety-Drunk I'm So Drunk.'" (115)

Here's some predictable open mic fodder:

"We went to this place called the Philip Smith house. It was run by these two gay men named David and Leon. They had a really cute partnership where David cooked breakfast and Leon fucked David. At least it seemed that way." (159)

And a hack joke about gender differences:

"There are female narcoleptics who fall asleep the moment they reach orgasm. I think you could call these women 'men.'" (179)

Ugh. I like you, Birbigli, so: what the fuck are you doing?

Rob says

I became a fan of Mike Birbiglia after hearing a handful of his stories on *This American Life* and *The Moth*. But before I could get around to checking out one of his albums or seeing one of his performances, *Sleepwalk With Me* was published, so I picked it up expecting great things. And in some ways, it is great. Just not quite as great as I expected.

In the AV Club interview that persuaded me to buy the book, I took notice when Birbiglia explained that his writing's guiding principle is that it not be about him so much as it be about the audience. And indeed, having been born into a very Catholic family in a northeastern suburb in the late '70s, much of this book is about me. But somehow I find the childhood anecdotes that make up its first half to be so familiar as to be uninteresting. Acting mostly as a character witness, they provide a good framework for what's to come, but despite their relatability, they are generally inessential. It is with Birbiglia's more unique adulthood experiences in the book's second half that the pages really start turning. The titular story of his sleep disorder, a strong finish, is worth the price of admission all by itself.

Birbiglia's self-awareness, gift for mixing humor and candor, and total lack of cynicism make this an engaging read throughout; I just wish it was less uneven. It's a good first book that I'm confident will lead to a great second one.

Rebecca says

p. 43 Growing up, I was a big fan of the Indiana Jones movies. I watched them again recently and found them to be misleading. Aspiring archaeologists across the world probably show up to their first day of work with their weather-worn fedoras and their whips and they're like, "Where's the cavern of jewels?" And their boss is like, "Actually, today we're gonna start off by dusting thousands of miles of nothing." The thing I admire most about these movies is the conviction and sense of self that Indy has. He's an archaeologist and an overly trusting action hero, and he's okay with that. Indy's always like, "My long-lost friend with a glass eye and a black suit needs a hand locating a crystal scepter that turns people into sand? Sure, I'll help. That sounds totally on the level."

p. 140 Talk about highs and lows. I was literally the highest I've ever been in my life and then I was told I might die. Which is like being handed a pizza and then being shot in the face. So I started crying, and because I was crying, my mother started crying, because crying is like throwing up. It's a chain reaction. For a week I had to wait for the results of the biopsy of the item they had found in my bladder. So for a week in my life I thought I might die - which is an incredible experience, if you ever have the chance to try it. You'll start talking to God even if you're not sure there's a God. You'll talk to anyone who might have more power than you, because you really want to cover your bases. You're like, 'God? Allah? The elephant thing from Hinduism? L. Ron Hubbard? Harry Potter?' I'm brand-loyal to Jesus, but I'm not stubborn. If someone has a plan, I'll hear 'em out.

Tim says

OK, before reading this book, I had encountered Birbiglia's sleepwalking story in three different formats:

- a) as a short story told live at The Moth (via This American Life);
- b) as a one man show (captured on CD, *Sleepwalk with Me Live*);
- c) dramatized in the 2012 movie, *Sleepwalk with Me*.

So I picked up this book because I'm a fan.

Does the story survive the transition from verbal to literary? Yes, but I really think his stories work best as part of Birbiglia's verbal repertoire. Some of the low-key charm of his performing style comes through on the page, but in filling out the stories for the page (a transcript of his act would be much shorter), the keen editing and pacing of the material is lost.

Doug says

A pretty fun collection of anecdotes by a comedian, it's an easy read and perfect for commuting.

This may be a little off topic, but comedians must be the most self-critical people on the planet. If I didn't

know who Tina Fey was, after reading Bossypants, I'd just assume that she looks like some ugly monster with big hairy forearms and not a ridiculously beautiful person. And all comedians who write books like this seem to have really socially awkward childhoods, but they all gloss over that part where they transmogrify into these supercool, well-adjusted people. Anyways, next time I read one of these books, I could do with less funniness if they tell me the secret to how they overcame their awkwardness - or at least, how to fake it.

Jason says

I first learned about Mike Birbiglia when he shared a story on This American Life. He's shared a few more stories on TAL since then, and he's also had a comedy special. Mike is an entertaining comic, and he had me laughing during his bits on TAL, on his special, and during this book.

There were a few less-exciting chapters, but overall this book had me smiling and sometimes even laughing out loud late at night when I should have been asleep but I was awake because sometimes Mike just really makes laugh and it's kind of exciting when someone can tell a really entertaining story.

Not to be too much of an English teacher, but sometimes the stories would just randomly change from past to present tense, and it would be really awkward, and I wondered why the editor didn't do anything about it. Also, I think I liked this book because I already had the Birbig's experience from TAL and his special, so I knew how he told stories and delivered jokes.

Still, I'm focusing too much on the negative, especially since I'm giving this a 4/5. Mike's hilarious. Read his book if you want a good laugh.

Jeremy says

Mr. Birbiglia is my favorite comedian, and I attempt to absorb everything he puts out into the world, but this book was really kind of frustrating, because not only does he recycle massive amounts of previous stand up work, a lot of the passages and chapters in this book are literally word for word from his stand-up specials and routines.

Sarah says

Did anyone else read the entire book in Mike Birbiglia's voice? Not out loud, that would be really creepy and weird, but in their head-voice? Because I did. I kept trying to get myself to stop and just read it in my normal head-voice, but I couldn't. Anyways....

The book was hilarious. It had some similar themes that he has in his stand-up, and a few familiar jokes, but I thought most of the stuff was different enough from what I'd already heard from him that it didn't feel stale. The whole thing was really random, but that kind of just make it more enjoyable and readable (I finished it in one evening), and also it fits with Birbiglia's comedy style. Most importantly to me, Mike Birbiglia is funny in a way that doesn't resort to stupid jokes about women or gay people or black people or any other stereotypes that are sometimes offensive but more often tiresome. Instead, he just seems like a really odd, nice guy, and that is refreshing. He also has surprisingly sad and poignant moments in the book - bonding

with his sister over bears, losing his faith when his mom was sick and thought she was going to hell, realizing his adulthood with his dad...that's the kind of stuff you'd never know about him from his stand-up, and it really gives the book a kind of genuine earnestness that elevates it above the level of a standard wacky-childhood-stories-and-tales-from-the-road comedy book.

I found the book honest, endearing, relatable, well-written, and also really, really funny. And now I'm off to see if I can find some of his stand-up on Netflix. If you like Mike Birbiglia, I would really recommend this. It was an evening well-spent for me, and my tummy still hurts from laughing.

Kim says

I probably should have listened to the audiobook. Mike is one of my favorite comedians, and I've heard a few of these stories performed by him before, including his "I'm the Hulk" story which is one of the funniest things I've ever heard. But reading his act just isn't the same - it definitely loses something in another medium.

Blanche says

Let's start by saying I adore Mike Birbiglia. He is an incredibly talented and genuine comedian, as well as a *very* sweet man (I got to meet him in person after his latest show). His recent movie, of the same title, was delightful. So when I saw this book, I obviously had to pick it up.

The book tells many stories that I have heard in his standup acts, but also includes a deeper look into his progression through the slog of becoming a professional comedian. Those views were my favorite parts of the book, giving me more insight into the highs and lows that he experienced. Mike Birbiglia has a knack for self-deprecation that isn't self-pitying, allowing you to laugh with him over the silly and embarrassing stories that everyone can relate to.

The reason I didn't give this a higher rating probably has more to do with the fact that I know his standup so well. Structure that works incredibly well in his shows doesn't translate quite as well to the page. I would say listen to his standup before buying this book.

Jennifer says

I'm a follower of the NPR program This American Life, where I first started hearing some of Mike Birbiglia's comedy routines. Admittedly, Ira Glass has a lot of pull with me, if Ira Glass said it, or liked it, I usually can't help myself in at least giving it a chance. I generally don't like comedians. I might begrudgingly laugh, but I have a hard time enjoying myself, because the flipside of what makes a comedian a good one...is so often their downfall. Their lives often seem - well, bipolar, they shine like a star on stage, and sink so deeply when they aren't on it. So much drugs, sex, extravagance and self loathing. It makes it hard to laugh. And yes, people have accused me in the past of overthinking things.

I didn't get that vibe from Mike Birbiglia. And usually if it's on TAL, it will be a little more thoughtful and a little less mainstream. Though he has the components, of a stereotypical comedian - the self-deprecation, the need to try and gain everyone's approval by making them laugh, and that slightly frantic ADD induced energy. But he manages to find humor in his family, and his life, and tells on himself, and all the most embarrassing stories, truly things that would be a bit awkward to relate - trips to the urologist, failed attempts at losing his virginity, childhood crushes that involved throwing up on the girl he was hoping to get his first kiss from. Mike Birbiglia has very, very few secrets left to him at this point. But, there's a bit of reveling in all this exposure, often a moral to the story (some things are more important than dinner), and laughing at himself, which seems more good humored than self loathing.

But as with most comedians, it's much funnier to hear their narration in person, or at least in audio. I would say 75% of the charm of his stories, is hearing him tell them. Reading them is just not the same. The parts of it I have seen live, I would be maxing out my 5 stars, but this I set at 3, because it doesn't quite crossover into really good writing, as much as it's really good onstage material.

Carrie Shaurette says

I liked this, but found it uneven at times, which is strange because I remember really liking the movie *Sleepwalk With Me*. I think I would have enjoyed listening to the audio because I feel like the delivery would have added something extra.

Christopher says

I love his stand up and even though this is a bunch of stories I've heard before, it was still a funny read. Several places had me in stitches to where I couldn't see the book to continue reading. My son loves it as well, though he had me gloss over some parts that were, shall we say, too handy? (I was trying to find a way to skip them anyway but then he took my pause in reading to look over my shoulder.)
