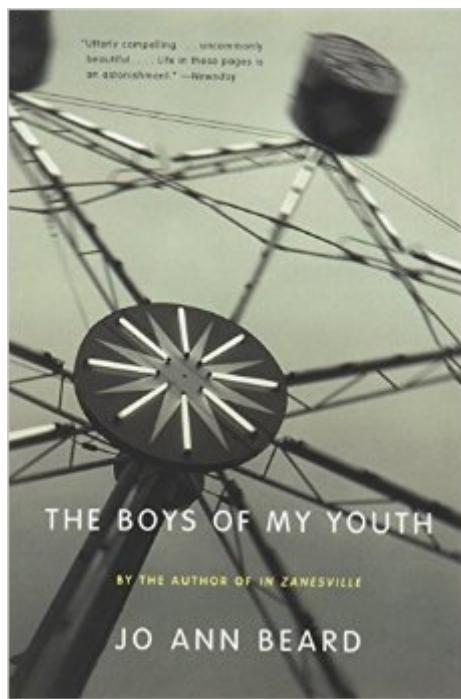


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The Boys Of My Youth



Synopsis

Rarely does the debut of a new writer garner such attention & acclaim. The excitement began the moment "The Fourth State of Matter," one of the fourteen extraordinary personal narratives in this book, appeared in the pages of the New Yorker. It increased when the author received a prestigious Whiting Foundation Award in November 1997, & it continued as the hardcover edition of The Boys of My Youth sold out its first printing even before publication. The author writes with perfect pitch as she takes us through one woman's life - from childhood to marriage & beyond - & memorably captures the collision of youthful longing & the hard intransigences of time & fate.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is so moving, so painfully touching. I read it over a weekend and could hardly put it down. As I read it, I kept on thinking of friends that I wanted to lend it to afterwards, but the more I read, the more I thought, This book's not leaving my sight; I'll tell my friends they have to buy their OWN copies. Jo Ann Beard is so poetic; she doesn't so much tell stories as offer brilliant vignettes of critical times in her life. She talks to the reader like he or she's a second self; she makes herself extremely vulnerable in this book. Her memories of childhood are so acute and observed so perfectly through a child's eyes--like being at an open-casket funeral and only being able to see the nose and glasses of the deceased from where she sits. I nearly caused a scene on the bus reading the "Dirty Barbies" story, because I was laughing so loud. Being a male, I have never been given so much insight into what it's like to grow up female as I was given in this book. It's a brilliant collection

of stories--evocative, faithful in the tiniest but most telling of details. I couldn't stop thinking about it when I had finished it. It's a wonder.

Like a flashback, Jo Ann Beard's collection of short stories takes you back in time. My favorite story is "Cousins" and is about two best-friend cousins. At an outdoor Eric Clapton concert the girls ingest a mild hallucinogen and discover pieces of their childhood in the quilt spread on the ground. One girl feels her halter top is coming off. When she looks at her cousin she is "cupping clouds." Moments later her cousin says, "The clouds are cupping me now," and she wants someone to "Get them off." Beard writes, "A guy on the blanket next to us tries to hand me a joint. I can't take it because I'm holding my chest. He looks at me, looks at Wendell balled up on the ground, and nods knowingly. 'Bummer,' he proclaims." With an exquisite eye for detail and lots of humor, Jo Ann Beard inspires memories of laughter and friendship and the heartache of youth that is never matched in later life. Upon completion of this book, you will find yourself thanking Jo Ann Beard for taking you back to that magical place in time. "The Boys of My Youth" is worth reading and re-reading and sharing with your best friends.

Not only do I agree with all of the other positive reviews as to Beard's uncanny ability to put us in her present, I have to say that Jo Ann Beard's use of language is some of the best I have ever read. As a writer, I am envious of her ability to be so clear, concise and poignant. I was amazed by this book on many levels. The underlined, highlighted, exclamation-pointed copy I will keep attests to that!

I bought Ms. Beard's *The Boys of My Youth*, her collection of fictionalized essays, and finished it in short order. It was a delight. Then I went back and read parts of it again. Then I tried another "quirky" writer a friend had recommended, but soon found myself rereading ALL of *The Boys of My Youth*. So there you have it. I love this writer. I think "Fourth State of Matter" is just about the most perfect piece of writing. Ever. So whenever you're ready, Jo Ann, we're out here, like one of your faithful dogs, waiting so hard.

Jo Ann Beard's collection of autobiographical essays, *The Boys of My Youth*, is a look at real life events, some seemingly minor and others monumental, that teaches the reader to look back and remember the things that have shaped your life. She writes in a way that, no matter what the situation--tragic, silly, or otherwise--one can relate to what she's talking about. Whether the reader

has been through the same thing or not, Beard brings the reader into the moment and makes him or her understand Beard's feelings. Her writing is honest and witty. I found myself laughing outloud and calling friends to read to them a specific section of an essay and end up reading the whole thing and sometimes others. Beard's essays range from devastating experiences to light-hearted memories of her youth, young adulthood, and beyond. Her voice and description bring not only humor and honesty to her essays, but also a vivid image of each scene that she is talking about. Beard's style of sectional writing and tying different scenes together at the end is so effective that as a reader, I never wanted to put the book down. Jo Ann Beard's book shows that every experience, no matter how small or large, can have an immense impact on the rest of your life.

The story is a loose and vague bio of Jo Ann Beard. It jumps around from one period of her life to another and is difficult to follow. The details of her connections with others were blah and failed to elicit any real emotional to me. I really had higher expectations based on other reviews.

For a book that I approached with the intention on learning how to write a little bit better (mostly on the description of emotion) I was pleasantly surprised. Jo Ann Beard makes poignant, oftentimes in one sentence, indications of the people she has met in her life. She even goes so far as to, in the last chapter, intone about the book and the people to whom she must speak to about the book. What lies within the cover is a collection of short stories, jumping back and forth between Beard's adult and younger life. Although her focus is on the males in her life, whether it be a male doll when she was a kid, her father, or a lover, she also describes those in her life that were female. It's a delicate tale, but faced with a lot of courage to bear open some of her inner demons, emotions, and mistakes. Although she details on how to be human, a facet often not easily captured, this was not the most compelling of stories. Don't get me wrong, I was engaged and curious about her tale. However, I was not unable to put it down or set it aside or to think of other things, such as her quality of writing while reading. I wish I could give half stars, and for that I might have depleted just a half, but c'est la vie. And before everyone shakes their finger at me for being mean towards a personal tale, it's also extremely feminist at times. It can, therefore, be a bit oppressive towards a male audience or an audience, such as myself, who is not so geared towards feminism. Don't let such a minor mishap get you down. This book is a keeper. It's an easy read, her writing is always poetic, and worth the time, the money, and the emotional burden.

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