



The Worst Years of Your Life: Stories for the Geeked-Out, Angst-Ridden, Lust-Addled, and Deeply Misunderstood Adolescent in All of Us

Mark Jude Poirier (Editor)

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A delightful and terrifying collection of twenty short stories, edited by critically acclaimed writer and novelist Mark Jude Poirier.

Adolescence. Fortunately it's over with early and once you've finished paying for therapy, there's still a chance to move on with your life.

The Worst Years of Your Life says it all: angst, depression, growing pains, puberty, nasty boys and nastier girls; these are stories of awkwardness and embarrassment from a stellar list of contributors. Great postmodern classics like John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" are paired with newer selections, such as Stacey Richter's "The Beauty Treatment" and A.M. Homes's "A Real Doll," in this searing, unforgettable collection. A perfect book for revisiting old favorites and discovering new ones, and the opportunity to relive the worst years of your life -- without having to relive the worst years of your life.

The Worst Years of Your Life: Stories for the Geeked-Out, Angst-Ridden, Lust-Addled, and Deeply Misunderstood Adolescent in All of Us Details

Date : Published August 21st 2007 by Simon Schuster

ISBN : 9781416549260

Author : Mark Jude Poirier (Editor)

Format : Paperback 400 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Anthologies, Young Adult, Family



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From Reader Review The Worst Years of Your Life: Stories for the Geeked-Out, Angst-Ridden, Lust-Addled, and Deeply Misunderstood Adolescent in All of Us for online ebook

Ellis says

I seemed unable to read as much as I wanted this summer, but I just finished this one. A collection of short stories about adolescence. Difficult to rate because some stories I enjoyed very much and others I felt rather indifferent about. However, I would recommend it, as I rather enjoyed the majority of the short stories. Most stories are very personal and, at times, uncomfortable to read.

Stephanie Grover says

The short stories included in this book made me feel like someone tapped into my diary for inspiration. The characters and situations made me laugh, cringe and sympathize with. The title definitely wraps up the comical stories that had me (only slightly) resenting that I hadn't thought of it first.

Fayette says

This anthology was very hit or miss for me. I loved the beautifully written, bittersweet "Note to Sixth-Grade Self." However many of the other stories were too dark, violent or disturbing for me to want to carry on reading. They were well written, that wasn't my problem with it. Just the content was sometimes too grim for me to want to spend time in that world. I made it about halfway through the book and then decided to bail.

Marie says

One thing I liked about this anthology was that the editor gets out of the way. After the introduction, there are no summaries, no explanation on why he chose the stories he did - I can simply experience them myself and draw my own conclusions.

Most of the stories in this collection capture the awkwardness of the teenage years, so it will most likely come down to a matter of taste and personal experiences on which stories are the "best."

My personal favorites:

Note to Sixth-Grade Self by Julie Orringer

I loved Orringer's anthology, How to Breathe Underwater, and this story is just as visceral and intense as her other work. A brutal examination of status and popularity.

At the Café Lovely by Rattawut Lapcharoensap

One of the few stories that is set outside the United States - in the Bangkok slums. Interesting to see the

universal elements of adolescence and sibling love as well as the differences in culture.

The Beauty Treatment by Stacey Richter

Reminded me of the film *Margaret* - how tragedy can make you aware that life won't conform to your own self-centered drama.

Alcatraz by Alicia Erian

An exploration of gender roles, fat-shaming, and sexuality.

Pretty Judy by Kevin Canty

A disturbing story on how our biology can betray us.

Thunderbird by Mark Jude Poirier

The story of a closeted gay boy and his ever-changing social status in the school hierarchy.

A Child's Book of Sickness and Death by Chris Adrian

A darkly humorous tale of a terminally sick girl and her adventures at the hospital she regularly visits.

Joey Jo says

I was excited to read this book; but was sorely disappointed. Most of the stories focus on bully/bullied relationships in the typical way: for males, an overt hatred; for females, friends who pretend to like you but then stab you in the back.

The third category of stories - sexual encounters, characterized by "A Real Doll" etc. - are too bizarre for my taste. The highlight was probably "Lost in the Funhouse" which has a more complex story-in-story leaving you wondering who the narrator is.

Erin says

Love the concept of this book (stories about the awkward, awful time of adolescences), but some of the stories very loosely were linked to the theme. There are some standouts though including George Saunders's "Bohemians" (which I believe is also in the 2005 nonrequired reading collection), Stacey Richter's "The Beauty Treatment", and Kevin Canty's "Pretty Judy". I also enjoyed the introduction.

Elizabeth says

a compilation of short stories written by people you've heard of and hopefully read. the stories are written with a lot of candor and seem to focus on the puberty stories of those not growing up easy breezy. if you struggled as a teenager, were lonely, picked on, had weird experiences that left you out of the 'in' crowd, i defy you to read this book and not relate to at least one of these stories. some of them are sad but most are hilarious.

Bob says

Most of these stories were unpleasant to me, but in a true and unsettling way, and the best, Chris Adrian's "A Child's Book of Sickness and Death" actually shocking.

The writing seemed uniformly good:

"There was some simple, radical difference about him; he hoped it was genius, feared it was madness, devoted himself to amiability and inconspicuousness." (p. 70)

"I was swinging at the time, watching the men from the moving company slide pieces of a fuzzy red water bed out of their truck, when my outgrown swing set pitched like a mechanical bull. A fire hydrant loomed, and I touched down somewhere along the curb. Through a small patch of consciousness, I looked up into the faces of four Mayflower movers as the sky ripped open and all of the clouds dropped to earth like wet rags." (p. 355)

I would not recommend the book to teenagers.

Maggie says

This is an interesting collection of short stories all focusing on life as an adolescent. I related to some of the experiences/emotions of a few of the characters, but many of the teens in this collection are pretty screwy--case in point the "A Real Doll" story featuring a talking Barbie. Highlights from the collection include the "A Child's Book of Sickness and Death" and "Thunderbird," and my favorite is "Note to Sixth-Grade Self." Those three selections alone are worth checking out the book.

Hollowspine says

I really enjoyed reading these stories, many of which contained the phrase, "in that awkward phase," or "at that awkward age." I'm wondering though, if that age ever really ends. I don't remember ever entering into that phase or exiting from it. I often find myself in situations similar to those in the stories even now. I don't think I ever will find myself outgrowing embarrassment or awkward situations.

This book contained a story from my favorite author, George Saunders, as well as some other authors whose collections of short stories I own. I even found that I had read one of the stories in the book already, "the beauty treatment." It was interesting realizing that I already owned that book, with that particular story in it.

Richard Van Camp says

If I ever teach a course on Young Adult literature, this will be one of the required texts. In *The Worst Years of Your Life*, published by Simon & Schuster Paperbacks. Mark Jude Pairier has gathered 20 stories about adolescence. *The Worst Years of Your Life* is a great read—well, most of it...I think the main problem was: who was the target audience for this collection—adults looking back on their teen years or to write something scandalous for teens to read and feel more adult?

Julie Orringer's "Note to Sixth Grade Self" is brilliant. They say that when it comes to bullying, boys use fists and girls use words. This story proves it! This is a warning story about how cruel girls can be to each other in school and the wisdom that can only be gained through time, and I love-LOVE-the ending of this story!

Chris Adrian's story "A Child's Book of Sickness and Death" should be turned into a novel. It works as a short story about a narrator with a chronic condition due to her own premature birth in the children's hospital, and I didn't want it to end. This writer and this story are brilliant!

Kevin Canty's "Pretty Judy" is dripping with guilt as the narrator has sex with another teen who's mentally delayed but has the body of a woman. Um, yeah. Maybe not high school safe, but certainly and completely engaging.

"A Real Doll" by A.M. Homes is disturbing and, again, I wish the editor had worked the author harder because I want to understand the ending. I've reread it several times and it just doesn't make sense. Be warned: this story is about sex with Barbie dolls and their heads. Disturbing content! (Another maybe on the "high school no no" list.)

Elizabeth Stuckey-French shares a dark and terribly terrific story from a psychotic teen who tries to drown a young girl after the young girl tries to drown her in "Junior" and the voice in this story is completely convincing. This may be a great complimentary female narrator story after reading "Male Teen Rage" novels like Touching Spirit Bear, Project X and Right Behind You.

The same with Stacey Richler's "The Beauty Treatment." The story opens up with the main character's face being slashed open by a "frenemy" and the story opens up to reveal a world of rules and conduct as a teen in high school today. Whoah!

I'm always suspicious of anthologies with work by the editor included but Mark's story, "Thunderbird" is one of the best in the collection: it's about homosexuality and the confusion of "am I or aren't I"? and it's so well done. He's nailed the voice of an adolescent and the ending is perfect.

There were a few stories in here that, in my opinion, didn't belong in the collection: Malinda McCollum's "Good Monks" could have been told by a 30 year old. I wasn't convinced this was YA and was actually insulted that this story was taking the space of what could have been another great adolescent story. Jennifer Egan's story, "Sisters of the Moon" should have been more flushed out. I still don't get it. Same with George Saunders "Bohemians." This wasn't YA magic to me. It felt more like a memoir and YA, to me, is immediate, right now, nothing more than doing the best you have with what you've got before you right now. Not looking back with wisdom (unless you can pull it off like Julie Orringer). This is why my eyes glazed over while reading John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse." Um, hello—memoir, and what was the point?

I was also disappointed with Jim Shepard's "Spending the Night with the Poor" because I didn't realize the narrator was supposed to be a girl until I was halfway through the story. Sorry, Jim. I love your work (especially your novel, Project X!) but the editor needed to work you a lot harder on the editing. I also could not understand "A Poetics for Bullies" by Stanley Elkin. It's about a bully but that's about it for me for getting it. The title threw me off and I gave up trying to understand what was going on a few pages in.

All in all, this was a great collection. I know I'm a tough ass but I love great YA. I'd give The Worst Years of Your Life 3 out of 5. Mark should have worked several of the authors a lot harder, and I wish he would have chosen more YA stories with voice and the immediate terror that comes with the territory of youth and hormones. This is where the next anthology comes in because it does all of this and it does it all so well.

Stephen Dorneman says

Although this anthology does capture the "geeked-out, angst-ridden, lust-addled" moments of adolescence well, it does so with stories of damaged teens and tweens that often rely on identification with the moment more than coherent plot and, particularly, satisfying endings. Perhaps that, too, is a truth about adolescence, but I expect more in my fiction. A mixed bag.

David says

This was a mixed bag, like all anthologies. Based on Mark Jude Poirier's excellent coming-of-age novel, "Goats", I was hoping for something out of the ordinary. But the stories in this collection rarely transcend your typical adolescent angst. There are, of course, subtypes:

adolescent cruelty/bullying : 5 stories
startling act of pathological adolescent violence : 2 stories
generalized adolescent confusion : 4 stories
adolescent horniness, consummated : 3 stories
adolescent lust, unconsummated : 3 stories
redefinition of adolescent relationship with parent(-like figure): 2 stories

There are a few standouts: "Bohemians" by George Saunders, Mark Jude Poirier's "Thunderbird", "Junior" by Elizabeth Stuckey-French. John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" was helpful in determining that I never want to read anything else by Barth. Most of the remaining contributions were inoffensive, but unmemorable. The better stories in the book are those that incorporate a realization of the absurdity of adolescent angst, and that don't take themselves too seriously. Only about half of the authors manage this. The number of exceptional contributions is not high enough to bump my overall rating beyond two stars.

The cumulative effect is highly depressing, which seems appropriate. The primary message I took away from this collection is just how glad I am to have survived adolescence reasonably intact.

Lisa says

Very hit or miss anthology where adult writers contribute stories about adolescence. I struggled to get through a few of these, but it's entirely worth it for the best story in the bunch, "A Child's Book of Sickness and Death," which chronicles the pain, frustration, and strangeness of coming of age as a chronically ill child.

I did appreciate that there was a decent mix of men and women, from both vantage points, but so many of the stories had little substance other than 'I was bullied.'

Oriana says

This novel of short stories tells the experiences of 20 author's in middle and high school and how coping with the hardships of adolescence affected them. The book sort of gives puberty and adolescence a negative tone, but the funny, twisty-turny, and witty approach most of the authors write with are what make the stories worth reading. I found that I could relate to most of the things the characters in each of the short stories were dealing with which made the novel even more interesting.
