



The Story of My Boyhood and Youth

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John Muir writes his first memoir about his life in Scotland as a boy in a strict and brutal religious family. A glimpse into Scottish country culture is seen through his eyes and his early love of nature is evident. Then the family moves to America and into the backwoods of Wisconsin to help settle the area for farming along with many other Scotch and Irish farmers. His life there growing up and the brutality of homesteading on wilderness under his cruel father is an education. Ready to leave home he invents incredible timepieces and a thermometer among other things and makes his way to the U. of Wisconsin. The American culture in Wisconsin is supportive of him and the story he tells is like another country compared to these times of patents and rivalries and thefts.

The Story of My Boyhood and Youth Details

Date : Published (first published 1913)

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Author : John Muir

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From Reader Review The Story of My Boyhood and Youth for online ebook

Jill Robbertze says

This is a delightful little book about John Muir's early life first in Scotland and later in the US. This man truly delights in nature and his descriptions of his discoveries are beautiful and very engaging. He became one of America's early conservationists and while at University he also created some very interesting inventions. I really enjoyed this book and give it 4.5 stars !!!

Deb says

Really enjoyed this book. A wonderful insight into the growing years of an amazing man who was a key player in the creation of our National Parks. One also gets a first person perspective of the early settler's life in the mid west.

Lartemis says

Honestly, I only dabbled in this as there was no audio book available. My book club's discussion was fascinating. Only one of 18 people didn't like the book. Everyone else loved it.

Brandon says

This is a deeply charming book. John Muir's boyhood and youth took place in a world much different, and much wilder, than the biologically impoverished world of today. He had a whippoorwill singing on the post outside his home in Wisconsin and passenger pigeons arrived in droves in the springtime. His observations of nature are oftentimes remarkable and show a keen attention to the natural world (e.g., he saw a shrike go into a groundhog burrow and come out chasing young groundhogs!). A very enjoyable book filled with many amazing tales and happenings.

Linda says

This is a book I re-read, this time for a book group, where each student read a different book by a naturalist. They've been studying nature writing and the teacher wanted to take them deeper into how the writers were changed by their own environment, thus the group and talk about how we also might be changed by both our reading and our personal experiences. For example, in Muir's book, I loved the deeply detailed descriptions of all the birds observed in his new home in Wisconsin (he was born in Scotland), but the importance of this book to me came from Muir's marvelous descriptions of the Passenger Pigeons, and then their extinction because of ignorance where people thought there was a limitless supply, and the killing and killing of thousands, sending them on the road to extinction. Even in this re-visiting of the book, I continue to be startled and sad and outraged that I can no longer see these birds, nor can I have the thrill of seeing so many

flocks of birds that they darken the sun for a while. It is hard to imagine such a thing. If you want a good story of Muir's roots, and how he began his journey toward being so influential in saving nature, this is a good beginning.

Brooke says

I really enjoyed this book. I've always respected John Muir (I first learned about him while learning about our national parks history) but now I feel like he could have been a dear friend. What a likable person! His stories of his rambunctious youth made me smile and gave me hope for my boys. I'm definitely going to have to read more of his writings.

Mike Suter says

A very honest account of Muir's humble beginnings in Scotland, then as a homesteader as a boy in Wisconsin, leading up to his college years and early adulthood. I was surprised to learn that he was required by his devout father to memorize the entire New Testament and most of the Old, and to learn Latin and Greek. He also was an avid inventor, and created elaborate clocks and timers that would tip people out of bed in the morning. He had a brutal childhood, and worked long days and was frequently beaten. That seems to have resulted in a stoicism that served him well in later life.

While the insight into Muir's beginnings are interesting, the book is equally valuable as a first-hand account of the difficulties of pioneer life in the mid-1800's. At one point, Muir comments on the tendency for White settlers to work themselves to death trying to achieve wealth, when the Indian farmers worked only enough to eat well, and seemed much happier. This early appeal for a balanced life -- making time to appreciate the wonders around us, and to protect them -- is why Muir is an important voice in American history with continuing relevance.

Bam says

After reading Alaska Days with John Muir, written by his friend and traveling companion Samuel Young, I thoroughly enjoyed reading Muir's own account of his early life: beginning in East Lothian, Scotland, where he was born in 1838; immigrated with his father and brother to America in 1849; settled in Wisconsin, near Portage, where they broke ground for their new home and farm; and there worked long, hard hours to make a go of things so his mother and siblings could join them. Being a born and raised Midwesterner myself, it was particularly interesting to read about the area, the flora and the fauna, in its early, unspoiled state.

I learned many new things about Muir as well. Did you know he was an inventor, for instance? Can't wait to read more of his first-hand accounts as he becomes the great environmentalist and explorer. What an amazing man!

Jay says

Muir looks back on his childhood in Scotland and in Wisconsin. From Scotland, where he was until 7, we get the stories of schoolkids fighting and exploring, and of the discipline learned. From Wisconsin, Muir writes

an ode to the animals and plants he encountered, as well as his story about growing up. He really focuses on the plants and animals, though -- his mother and sisters immigrate a year after Muir and his father and brothers do, and Muir doesn't bother to tell you much about them. It's all about the natural. Near the end of this short book, you also learn that Muir is an inventor, and some of the inventions he described (especially the combination Murphy bed/alarm clock/timed study desk) sounded quite elaborate (I was thinking like Pee Wee Herman's breakfast machine in "Pee Wee's Big Adventure"). The book was obviously written many decades after the fact, and you wonder how much Muir embellished, because he comes across as a "natural" natural scientist - noticing everything from flower and bug to pigeon and sky) at a young age and untrained -- and as a genius inventor. His writing does show his passion for the topic and his Midwestern sensibility -- seems like an interesting man.

Sally says

Muir's writing is beautiful but it is sad to read about the destruction of the Wisconsin wilderness by settlers. Muir's family moved from Scotland to Wisconsin in the 19th century to farm. He has great affection for all the wild animals and plants he encountered. He was a keen observer of the life around him.

Tanvika says

What a soul stirring and uplifting, even spiritual experiences I had while going through the wondrous and magical moments of young Muir.

His strict, Christian upbringing, thrashing at home and school couldn't kill the wildness and spirit of living, the young lad had. The thrill of running around, playing 'shooters' with his brother David, climbing lessons at the castle, the fright of the 'dandy doctors' haunting the school are reminiscent of how little kids create their own fantasy worlds, taking risks to explore breaking the rules set by adults.

The coming of his family to America, further nurtures his love for Nature. One finds moving accounts of birds of various kinds, snakes, pets (a pony and dog called watch), deers, squirrels, Badgers etc. The fear of the mother pig, the courage of a geese to help his kind, the bravery of the kingbird to protect his nest show us that essentially we have a unity with other beings. If we try to understand them, will we live harmoniously. Otherwise, human will keep on killing others seeing them as dollar bills, which Muir laments repeatedly, telling us about the shameful hunting sport pursued by young boys. He clearly disagrees with the human supremacy story propogated by the church in those days.

He was also a young inventor who made clocks and barometers. His tireless spirit and love for the wild made me wake up quite early to feel the gift given to us.

Barry Cunningham says

Actually, the Project Gutenberg edition on Stanza on my iPhone.

I read Muir's **The Yosemite** last year and found that book and him utterly amazing. Decided to read some more of his works, and this seemed like the logical place to start.

His origins may not have been that unusual for his time, but where he went from there in his late youth and early manhood seem entirely unexpected.

His early life and his narrative fall into three parts: his early youth in Scotland, his emigration to America and adolescence spent in help his family carve two farms out of the wilderness in Wisconsin, and his remarkable pursuit of an education and cultivation of his inventive genius.

In his early schooling in Scotland, corporal punishment was the chief pedagogical technique. Sort of an early form of standardized testing: no child left unscathed. This, and the savagery of the other boys in school, might have soured one on education forever. Remarkably, in Muir's case, they did not. Even in the narrative of his early youth, he describes his explorations of nature: observing birds and finding their eggs.

Suddenly, in 1849, when Muir was about eleven, his father decided the family would emigrate to America. First, his father and the three eldest children, made the crossing and found some land in Wisconsin. They built a shanty and set about the hard work of making a farm out of the wilderness. By fall, they had cleared the land and built a frame house so that the rest of the family was able to join them. But despite the hard labor that this entailed, his description of this time is one of overwhelming joy as he and his brother Daniel enjoy the freedom of the wilderness and discover the animals of the woods and the farm. This part of his narrative contains vivid descriptions of his discovery of nature around him.

After eight years, having already built a comfortable farm, his father bought another half-section of land four or five miles distant, and again commenced the back-breaking work of clearing it and building it up. Remarkably, for all the strenuous work he was doing and his father's strict religious discouragement, Muir set about trying to educate himself in what little time he had available outside of work. He got his father to buy him a book on arithmetic, and despite not having attended school since the age of 11, he was able to work through it in short order. He then set about trying to read all that he could, borrowing or acquiring books as he could. All this was sternly opposed by his father, who believed that the Bible was the only book he needed. Muir would try to steal five to ten minutes to read by candlelight around 8pm before his father would admonish him to put out the light and go to bed to be ready for work tomorrow.

One night, his father made the tactical mistake of telling him that he shouldn't have to be scolded every night into putting out the light, but that he could get up as early as he liked. Immediately, Muir began going to bed with the rest of the family, but getting up at 1 AM to work on his inventions. He built scientific instruments and whittled clocks of his own design.

Later, when he showed them to a knowledgeable neighbor, he was told he should go exhibit them at the State Fair, and that he could easily secure a job in a machine shop. Eventually, this is just what he did. When he left home for the State Fair, his father assured him that he was on his own and if he should run into a rough spell, he shouldn't look to his father for help.

At the State Fair, he was offered a job in a machine shop. After a few months though, it did really work out. There wasn't enough work or instruction available to satisfy him. So he moved to Madison. After a little while he figured out that he could get into the University of Wisconsin, teaching himself enough to keep up with the rest of the students, and earn enough doing odd jobs to put himself through college.

So that's just what he did, learning a great variety of things befitting his wonderous curiosity: botany, geology, chemistry, sciences, and engineering.

End of youth. He wrote more books about later.

David S. says

John Muir: naturalist, humanitarian, inventor, great lover? I know so. John Muir was a fantastic lover; gentle, but a real power house when he needed to be. I remember the first time I visited him at his Northern Wisconsin farm in the peak of summer...

Rivers twisted by, heated all day by the scorching late summer sun. Sometimes, the water laid long and wide across the country, other times, it became forced to pour, chortling, vigorously over mossy boulders.

Walking through a patch of Balsam Firs I heard the pitched wailings of many birds. John grabbed my hand and used it as a pointer calling out the name of the singer, "Whippoorwill, Mocking bird, Wooooo Peeeecker," he screamed excitedly. I giggled like a school girl, but then gasped quickly, when I caught his dark almond eyes boring into me, penetrating me; his long hobo beard draping him in layers of mystery. For some reason I didn't feel lost at all with him; even in a dark woods. He pointed out honey bee hives, let me stick my head into Gopher hole catacombs, and allowed me to see the tracks of the Winnebago Indian that stole "Ol' Joe", his horse. He guided me down a path through droves of Oak and Maple, that he had carved himself when he harvested the wood to make his simple log cabin. I could smell maple syrup flowing somewhere near by.

Behind his house, in the barn, he would show me something truly special. At first, It appeared big and phallic in the shadow of the pig oil lamp. The musk of the barn was overpowering. However, upon closer examination, I saw the intricacies of a scientific masterpiece. Wait a tick. Those are chimes! My God, was that a pendulum! My lord it really was---It was a mechanical clock. Amazing! How unexpected to see something so linked to the modern world out here in the middle of the woods. And then as if he had planned it, a tiny bird shot forth and let out its long winded cuck—coooooooooo! Truly beautiful, and I'm not bashful about saying, that would only be the first climax of the day. There was indeed, a rare sexy genius hidden behind those homemade clothes and back woods ways.

The spices and meats simmering in the pot only added to the pheromones that were floating through the air. I sat at the only table in the house made from old growth Heart Pine and Mountain Lion sinew. We ate hungrily, a delicious stew, made of venison, rabbit, gopher, and the secret ingredient (John wasn't bashful about admitting) field mice. Nothing was wasted in John's naturalistic world. I looked about his homestead, looking for clues to his peacefulness, but there was nothing. Literally, there was nothing. Just those eyes staring at me, filling me with his lack of wealth. Exhilarating!

I was lovesick in his world and he knew it. Recognizing my notion he carried me to his bedroom, pointing out as he lie me down that it was crafted from a mixture of Eastern Red Cedar and Common Juniper. I could only wonder what surprises and secrets I was in for next. I lie on my belly and he spread something warm and wet across my bare back. He massaged me like I was the only person in the world, as if passion had no future or past, there was only now. The present was all that ever mattered. My muscles melted away off my bones, now it was the rest of my body that craved satisfaction. "Where did you get that massage oil?" I asked, trying to slow down what couldn't be stopped.

"It's bear grease from my last big kill up near Platteville," he answered.

"GRRRRRR." I said

To say that it wasn't the most passion I have ever felt would be lie. To say that it wasn't the most satisfied I have ever felt would be a lie. To say that it wasn't the most romantic I have ever felt, would also be a lie. At one point I remember my head facing towards the window and John while continuing to make love to me pointed up into the star lit night and said, "Let Orion and his belt and his mighty sword be your only lover." I love you John Muir I thought at that moment.

Later, after we were both satiated and the fire of sunrise began to creep over the window ledge, John, always with more to do, got up and went into the corner. When I turned to look I couldn't help but smile. He was sitting comfortably, incubating a giant egg. Oh John, my naturalist!

Rafelmenmell says

La infancia era bastante salvaje en aquellos tiempos

Eileen says

3.5 stars

An insightful and engaging glimpse into the formative years of a renowned naturalist.

Chris Foley says

Work hard, and notice everything.

Jamie says

I'd heard in passing the name of John Muir but knew nothing of him until now. A look into the beginnings of a remarkable life. He writes conversationally, so that the book feels like him sitting next to you and telling you a story.

Kenny says

I thought this was a wonderful! I truly admire how well John Muir respected nature, and what a thinker he was! He really was an amazing person! I can't believe he invented so many things as a child/teenager.

Pam says

3.5 stars

Sherry Elmer says

This is a delightful story of a curious, creative, inventive boy's youth in the Wisconsin wilderness. John Muir had such an affinity for wildlife, especially birds, and a great memory for the significant detail, making this memoir a treasure. It was also a good reminder to be good stewards of this beautiful planet, as John Muir wrote about the extreme abundance of passenger pigeons in his time. "Extinct" is such a sad word! Most of the book was entertaining and enjoyable, though. My husband and ten year old son enjoyed this book as much as I did. I look forward to reading more of Muir's writing.
