



Paperboy

Christopher Fowler

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Christopher Fowler's memoir captures life in suburban London as it has rarely been seen: through the eyes of a lonely boy who spends his days between the library and the cinema, devouring novels, comics, cereal packets - anything that might reveal a story. Caught between an ever-sensible but exhausted mother and a DIY-obsessed father fighting his own demons, Christopher takes refuge in words. His parents try to understand their son's peculiar obsessions, but fast lose patience with him - and each other. The war of nerves escalates to include every member of the Fowler family, and something has to give, but does it mean that a boy must always give up his dreams for the tough lessons of real life? Beautifully written, this rich and astute evocation of a time and a place recalls a childhood at once entertainingly eccentric and endearingly ordinary.

Paperboy Details

Date : Published February 12th 2009 by Doubleday (first published 2009)

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Author : Christopher Fowler

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From Reader Review Paperboy for online ebook

Andy Plonka says

I wish he had written more about himself and less about the comic books he enjoyed as a boy.

Anya Mackay says

I read this book in a few days. Chris grows up in the 50's and uses books and movies as an escapism from his family life. I loved reading about his relationship with his parents and how it influenced and shaped him.

I struggled slightly with the long descriptions of British movies and film and some of the books. I grew up in the 70's and 80's in Germany so none of these were familiar to me. I found myself skipping some of these pages to get back to Chris's description of his family life.

I did enjoy the book and I think if I had seen the movies and been able to relive my childhood through his memoir it would have been a 5 star read.

I was delighted to win this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

Martin Belcher says

This is Christopher Fowler's memoirs of growing up in suburban London in the 1950's and 1960's, it was quite entertaining and brought back some nice memories of a way of life that is not that long ago that was not digital, no Internet or fast food or 24 hour telly (just three TV channels, but always something to watch!) Childhood entertainment was a book, a toy or a board game and the highlight of the week was a visit to the local library or to a local newsagent to buy a comic and some sweets.... The memoir becomes a little more serious as the book goes on and his relationship with his father is very complicated. I have to give it three stars as I found it a little depressing and tedious in places.

Nigeyb says

This is the third consecutive book I have read by Christopher Fowler - and all have been very different. Paperboy is a memoir of Christopher Fowler's childhood in suburban London during the 1950s and 1960s. He was a lonely boy who spent his days between the library and the cinema, whilst devouring novels and comics.

His family was very dysfunctional: a curious combination of the entertainingly eccentric, wilfully self-defeating and endearingly ordinary. Christopher Fowler perfectly captures the grim monochromatic world of post-war Britain before it became a more colour world from the late-1960s and, to an extent, broke free of the post-war world of tight-lipped austerity, stultifying conformity and thwarted ambition.

Paperboy is far from perfect, and frequently felt meandering and lacking in focus, however there are more sections that are funny, charming, poignant and wise than anything else, and overall I enjoyed it. I'd say people who grew up in Britain in the 1950s, 1960s or 1970s would probably get more out of it as it's such a rich and astute evocation of an era that felt very familiar despite my being ten years younger than Christopher Fowler.

4/5

Rebecca McNutt says

Paperboy is a memoir that goes in-depth through the life of an introvert young child. Readers get the experience to be swept through the nostalgia of 20th century London in vibrant descriptions and vivid people. Fowler's book is at times hilarious, at times serious at at times just innocent and filled with the imagination of childhood.

Eli Brooke says

For some reason the library where I work recently received this memoir despite owning none of the author's novels. I picked it up because I liked the cover, and it had been a while since I'd read anything but fiction. Fowler is a wonderful writer, and I related very much to his childhood passion for reading as an escape from isolation and intense family tension. Surprisingly, I also learned a great deal about British post-war cultural attitudes from this book that I had never really understood before. Of course this just makes me want to read Christopher Fowler's fiction, but I'm rather glad I found him this way. He's got a wonderful way of telling stories and getting at the psychological roots of interpersonal relationships without being too overt about it.

Edgar W says

This is the finest memoir of a young person I have read in many many years probably ever. It's about a young man's development as a writer and the hardships and joys of a most uncommon young life. Throughout the book Mr Fowler offers guidance and advice to potential writers most often through the words of his mother and finally from himself at the end of this book His relationship with his father is sad but honestly told.

George Kingsley says

I loved this book and feel like anyone who loves reading and writing should devour it. Christopher Fowler may not the most well-known author in the UK but I think he is an extremely gifted writer who has honed his craft for many decades.

Not only is the book sharply observed and witty, there is also a deep emotional core that manages to resonate without being melodramatic or cheap.

This was a very inspiring book for me.

Jane says

I have to confess that I have never read any of Christopher Fowler's fiction. His early books didn't appeal; his Bryant & May series sounds wonderful, but I haven't quite got to it yet. So when I saw the man's name on the literary fiction bookshelf in the library, I picked the book up out of general curiosity, just to see what it was about. I didn't mean to borrow it, but as I scanned the early pages a few simple sentences caught my eye.

"My bedroom was filled with reading material: books salvaged from dustbins, books borrowed from friends, books with missing pages, books found in the street, abandoned, unreadable, torn, scribbled on, unloved, unwanted and dismissed. My bedroom was the Battersea Dogs Home of books."

With that I stopped thinking of Christopher Fowler as a to be read author and started thinking of him as a fellow book lover. The book came home, and I'm very glad that it did.

At the heart of Paperboy is a boy growing up in a London suburb in the fifties and sixties. It's not a world I remember, but the book brings it life beautifully.

And then there's the family. Dysfunctional is probably the word, though it doesn't suit the period. His mother struggles to hold the family together, while his father was clearly troubled and difficult to live with.

And so young Christopher finds an escape route courtesy of the written word. First comics, then an assortment of books, until he discovers the boundless possibilities of public libraries.

His father will never understand Christopher, but fortunately his mother does, and gently encourages his reading and writing aspirations.

It's a simple story, in many ways an unremarkable story, and yet it's a story that comes completely to life because it is so perfectly observed and so packed with wonderful details. And all considered with warmth, wit, intelligence and a distinctive point of view.

I'd love to share every detail but I can't, so let's pick a few pages at random:

* The futility of exam questions.

* His mother's list of favourite authors.

* The joy of a new comic and a bar of chocolate.

* The arrival of Doctor Who.

* Reasons why the era of swinging London began in 1960.

* Caravan holidays.

* The gap between British and Hollywood cinema.

Yes, all of the details that illuminated a young life are here.

This is a book that you'll want to read from cover to cover, but it's also a book you can dip into and enjoy a few pages at a time

I'm very sorry that I shall have to give this one back to the library.

Matthew Bright says

Christopher Fowler grows up in a sixties household, on streets where there are no cars, and double bills play at the cinema. His father fails to patch up the house repeatedly, is still attached to his mother's razor-sharp apron strings, and doesn't approve of his son's 'imagination'. His mother is quietly brave and let's Christopher hide under the table, reading War and Peace to the cat to stop him having to go hold up a car, or a motorcycle, or other activity designed to toughen him up.

It would be really easy to say that this book is 'a paean to imagination; books and films and adventures in your own head that allow you to survive a childhood, and to a long-lost era'. That's often what memoirs are, but Fowler simultaneously reminds everyone that the sixties weren't that great whilst enshrining a childhood in the same way that you look back at schoolyard bullying two decades later and think that the pants-wetting terror wasn't that bad after all—telescopic nostalgia.

Read the rest of the review at <http://mcresswell.wordpress.com/2013/...>

Soho Black says

Stephen King once said that one of the questions he is most frequently asked is "Where do you get your ideas?" As an occasional short story writer, I now realise that ideas can come from pretty much anywhere, although much of what I write does have a personal element to it. However, even having a rough answer from my own experience doesn't stop me wanting to find out how others would answer the same question, as it can be different for us all. Particularly when one of my favourite and criminally under-read authors writes an autobiography that may provide some of the answers.

It appears that Christopher Fowler has always been blessed with a vivid imagination. His story opens with him avoiding a sunshine death ray on the pavement before he injures himself on a rollercoaster of his own design and construction in the back yard. Fowler tends to lose himself in a world of daydreams, comic books, novels and films. Although, growing up in 1960s England, a country struggling to recover from the effects of World War II, this is hardly surprising, as his imagined world was a far better one than the reality he would have faced otherwise.

Like many children with more than a passing interest in books, he is largely shunned by his peers and seems to have few friends. His home situation doesn't help, as his father doesn't understand his imagination and

tries to get him interested in more "real" pursuits, like helping with DIY or repairing the motorbikes in the back room. His mother does secretly share some of his love of reading, but is a generally quiet figure and doesn't get much opportunity to encourage him. Added to this is a hostility between the two sets of grandparents and it's a tough upbringing.

At first glance, you may think this has the potential to be a depressing read, thanks to the times and situations it's written in. But Fowler's writing style prevents this ever happening. That's not to say it's not full of the kind of emotion and regret that a solitary lifestyle in which he feels distanced from both his peers and his parents can lead to. Fowler has always excelled in creating realistic characters in his fiction writing and so he is able to present a very vivid depiction of those he comes across in real life. The desperation of his mother's situation and the awkwardness as the families meet are clearly presented. The rough edges that his father contains and the emotional and physical difficulties he has living with them, breaking away from them and dealing with them as they smooth off later on can be felt through his words.

An added bonus here is that Fowler has always written with an eye for the humorous and even in difficult situations like his life, this remains present. He writes with a twinkle in his eye which is apparent, either in the recollections themselves, or in the footnotes. His early description of Weetabix as wet roofing felt and rotting chipboard is hilarious to someone who spent many years eating it at breakfast. Even the tales from the front room, which aren't always funny in themselves, are often rendered so with frequent sprinklings of childish naïveté.

However, as amusing as things are, it's the moments where you get to glimpse Fowler's fictional writing coming through that I enjoyed the most. As an avid reader of many of these stories, I was able to pick up on many of the events that would later inspire short stories. There were many such moments and I could pick up on most of them and it's incredible to see how many of his life's events Fowler has managed to use later on. It was interesting to see how differently they turned out, with some events being added to give them a darker outlook and some expanding into a case of wishful thinking to provide a happier ending than the reality allowed them to have first time around.

If there is one slight downfall, it's that I felt the memoir ended way too soon. It takes him only to the point at which he is beginning to write, but is as yet unpublished. As a fan, I know he has since gone on to run a film company and has written many novels and short stories and I would have liked to have heard more about how he juggled the roles and how he first came to be published. What is here is excellent and it was wonderful to hear more about a favourite author, but there was little about the writing process, even if I can see now where many of the ideas came from. I hope there is to be a second part to this life story, even if I do slightly resent having to pay for another book to find out parts of the life that wasn't present here.

This minor disappointment aside, this is a beautifully written autobiography. There is none of the backbiting and self promotion that frequently occurs in celebrity biographies. There is simply a searing honesty, where Fowler proves, also unlike many celebrity biographies, that honesty and good writing don't need to be separated. For one of the best written biographies I've read, as well as a wryly humorous look at life in 1960s London, this is well worth a look. For anyone who has discovered Fowler and enjoys his fictional writing as much as I do, this is virtually indispensable at any price.

This review may also appear, in whole or in part, under my name at any or all of www.ciao.co.uk, www.thebookbag.co.uk, www.goodreads.com, www.amazon.co.uk and www.dooyoo.co.uk

MrsCordial says

This has nostalgia value and describes marvellously the effect books can have on certain sorts of children (I was a bit like that too), but if it's a representative example of Christopher Fowler's writing then it does little to encourage me to read his works of fiction. The book was allowed to ramble on long after the point had been amply made, and if one's own precocious childhood reading and film-absorbing hadn't involved the same titles Fowler read and saw, then chunks of the book are mildly diverting but unrewarding.

Jennifer says

I was surprised to enjoy this a fraction less than the later *Film Freak*, given that this phase of Fowler's memoirs focusses on his childhood and on his love of books and writing, although the films come into it too. Still enjoyable and funny, and life in the Fowler household is just too sour for the nostalgia to become a cosy swallow. Exemplifies 'quiet desperation'.

There are wry footnotes for those not 'privileged' to share the personal history by dint of being the other side of the Atlantic or about 40, but they rather fizzle out, so there is, for example, no explanation of snoek (although the passage in which it occurs where his godawful grandmother attempts a takeover is amusing enough in its grim way)

It's a very kind but clear sighted book. He even tries to get his head round the ghastly granny, which is perhaps why he's a good novelist.

Lukas Van Veen says

Everyone has the same feelings; they just think differently.

Phillip Edwards says

A memoir of a book-loving boy growing up in England back in the 1950s & 1960s, when putting salt on your crisps passed for entertainment. The food, the pastimes, the family dysfunctions, the being gay, the mivvis, the toys and games. It brought back memories, made me smile and it made my heart bleed.

"I was not allowed to mix with the kids from the next street because they lived above shops and were therefore 'common'. My mother had a peculiar sense of what constituted commonness. Heinz Baked Beans, football, margarine, Spam, the Daily Mirror, council flats, motorbikes, public displays of emotion, playing in the street, television, tattoos, dyed hair, shouting, swearing, braces, the Labour Party, plimsolls worn with trousers, over-familiarity, and failure to hold a knife and fork properly were unconscionable..."
