



# Lake Effect

RICH COHEN

"So outrageous and so true. . . . The book rocks along, powered by the high octane of Cohen's candor (and) off-beat observation."  
—THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW



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*Rich Cohen*

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*Rich Cohen*

**Lake Effect** Rich Cohen  
A *New York Times* Notable Book

Winner of the Great Lakes Book Award and the 21st Century Award from the Chicago Public Library

Raised in an affluent suburb on the North Shore of Chicago, Rich Cohen had a cluster of interesting friends, but none more interesting than Jamie Drew. Fatherless, reckless, and lower middle class in a place that wasn't, Jamie possessed such an irresistible insouciance and charm that even the teachers called him Drew-licious. Through the high school years of parties and Cub games and girls, of summer nights on the beach and forbidden forays into the blues bars of Chicago's notorious South Side, the two formed an inseparable bond. Even after Cohen went to college in New Orleans (Jamie went to Kansas) and then moved to New York, where he had a memorable interlude with the legendary *New Yorker* writer Joseph Mitchell, Jamie remained oddly crucial to his life. Exquisite and taut, **Lake Effect** is a bittersweet coming-of-age story that quietly bores to the essence of friendship and how it survives even as it is destined to change.

## Lake Effect Details

Date : Published April 8th 2003 by Vintage (first published April 8th 2002)

ISBN : 9780375725333

Author : Rich Cohen

Format : Paperback 224 pages

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## From Reader Review Lake Effect for online ebook

### **Jennifer Lindsay says**

I really enjoyed this memoir. it was funny and authentic and honest and I loved all of the chicagoland references.

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### **Michelle says**

I was excited to read this regional great lakes set memoir for book club but it didn't hook me. There were good moments on the lake and some good writing and easy reading but this writer and I had totally different lives and made very different decisions in life (drugs being one, sex another). It was hard for me to relate to him and I was a little excited because we both grew up in the same time frame. Maybe it's the guy thing. I thought I was getting over that--I-can-only-read-girls-because-I-don't-get-guys mentality.

Lake Effect

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### **Pop Bop says**

#### Remembering "the Guy"

Every gang of teenage male friends has someone who is "the Guy". He has all the best ideas, can always get a car, is wise in the ways of girls, and knows bars where they don't card. He always has a pal or knows someone who can get you in to wherever it is you want to go. When he smiles at a diner waitress at 2:00 a.m., she smiles back. All of the Moms think he's charming and responsible and you can get permission to go along on any road trip if the Guy's going to be there.

This book is a specific example/memory piece of one such guy, Jamie, written by his best friend. It starts in New Trier High School, and since that's the same school where Ferris Bueller and all of those John Hughes "Pretty in Pink" people went to school, you know the book's bona fides are legit. It's actually sort of a fictionalized nonfiction memoir, but that's O.K. because a little embroidering in the service of a larger goal is fine.

I thought this might end up being a sort of shaggy dog story that would run out of steam. But it is much more than that. Because Cohen takes a modest and low key approach it's a little deceptive, and it takes you a while to realize and appreciate just how well written this book is. It's not just manic tales and socko adventures. There's not even much of that. It's lots of little bits - sometimes a page long, maybe a paragraph, even just a line - but they add up to something that feels true and authentic about the daily job of just growing up. It's a bit wistful, but has a bit of an air of a survivor's pride. Cohen understands now some of the things he remembers from then, and that understanding informs his story.

And the book really works on two levels. On one hand you enjoy the skill with which Cohen tells his story and you appreciate the people and events and sensations he recounts. On a different level, though, his writing reminds you of people and events and sensations from your own life, (if you're the right age), and these

memories, if you are lucky, are warm and tinged with the generous humanity Cohen brings to his writing.

Sure, once we get to college it's all about Cohen, and his time at the *New Yorker* is the same. Interesting, but not universally interesting. It kept my interest because Cohen is such an engaging writer, but mostly because I knew we were going to have to circle back to Jamie by the end. And that ending, which isn't socko, but which nicely wraps up the book, was worth the wait.

So, this is a memorable and satisfying book, and a real writer's book with quality touches too numerous to mention. A nice, mellow find.

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### **Lee Thames says**

I read this based on someone's recommendation.

Uneven and holes in the story. Author states that he and his father were going through a 'hate-each-other' period. While throughout the book the author has the 'cool' father. No further explanation.

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### **Kim says**

Not much going for this dull autobiography. Only kept my interest because he is talking about the area where I live, so the name dropping kept it tolerable.

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### **Jason says**

I have to admit that I'm a bit biased when it comes to boys' coming of age stories. *Stand By Me* is one of my favorite movies, and I just really like that genre. This is the first memoir I've ever read, so I can't really compare it to anything else. However, let me say that I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

Basically this dude (Rich Cohen) talks about his senior year of high school through his late 20s. The heaviest focus is the senior year, and first year of college, and most all of it focuses on his best friend Jamie, who is one of those special people who just happens to be the center of attention wherever he goes. He doesn't do it intentionally; it's just part of the natural flow of things. Were this written by Robert Jordan, he'd be called a ta'veren. I guess we all know someone like that, and typically don't begrudge them for it.

I related a lot to Jamie in the book, the free spirit part of him. Or maybe it was the part of me that wishes I could be more like Jamie that was doing the relating. One thing is for sure: even though Rich was just talking about typical adolescent life, and there weren't any great adventures involved, his was much more interesting than mine.

Another thing I really enjoyed about this book is that it was very well written, and it invoked the appropriate emotions in me. Moments sublime with intervals hilarious, if you will. I wouldn't recommend this book to just anyone because it's not for everyone, but if you're looking for a well written memoir about adolescent boys/young men, then this is definitely the book for you. There's plenty of cussing, drinking, carousing, and

all the other fun stuff that makes for a good tale.

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### **David L. says**

I had never heard of this author until I read Neil Steinberg's blog and he spoke of Mr. Cohen's excellent writing. I was curious and this was the only book available at the local library. I enjoyed his coming-of-age story but I really didn't understand what made Jamie so magical. They did a lot of high school hijinks with typical teen angst and then he went to college and saw Jamie infrequently. He remained a legend in the author's mind. I imagine I will seek something else out by this author.

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### **Andrew says**

At some point in their lives, everyone meets someone cut from that blueprint Cohen fleshed out here in Jamie Drew. *Lake Effect* captures, in his own words, "what happens to such friendships when the afternoon runs into evening." A simple and beautiful memoir.

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### **Theo says**

Descriptions of moments and places that made me feel I was in these places never visited, moments never experienced. Hit home on a number of levels having grown up in the 80's. Explores the quiet growth and accompanying pain of male friendships.

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### **Trevians says**

I guess I know Rich Cohen in a roundabout way, since I worked with New Trier students in the 1980s. The picture of his friends on the cover includes a friend of his, (ironically named Jamie) though not the kid Jamie Drew is based on. (I have a suspicion he is who Tom Pistone is based on.) I have been working with North Shore teenagers for 40 years, and the book forced me to remember some of the 50 or so special kids who touched me, not just for their unusually intense angst, the unusual lack of parental connections or caring, but also for a sense of pain, loneliness, uniqueness, attempts to wind their way through a tight programmed life, when they wanted to change the channel and didn't know how. For those who want to also get sort of the sense of this side of New Trier, may I suggest reading "Fast Times at New Trier High" Time Magazine article (I think). Rich Cohen wrote a book that was difficult to put down, I stayed up all night to read it. It brought back a flood of memories of my own.

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### **Steve says**

Nice story of growing up on the North Shore of Chicago suburbs. But Cohen never fills out Jamie enough to make me understand why he is so admired. He often talks about the "great things" Jamie has done, but never describes them. When he does it comes off as nothing more than sophomoric, drunk/drugged hijinks. When

he does give us some of Jamie's talk it comes off as simple stoner BS. And I have a real problem w/ white suburban kids so in love w/ Chicago blues, pontificating on how this is the "real music". Ever notice how there are no black people in the blues bars other than relatives of the band and old foggies?

Nice color of Chicago and NOLA, but otherwise I'm not convinced Jamie was such an amazing individual in his youth.

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### **Dana says**

This is a good book, especially if you have grown up on the North Shore of Lake Michigan (north of the city of Chicago), which I have. You know what Mr. Cohen is talking about and you know the places he describes. It hits home because of the way the "North Shore" was and still is. It's worth the read for anyone with difficulties growing up and those who are from this area.

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### **ba says**

Imagine you grew up in Glencoe, and you tried to write a Kerouac novel in the style of Ray Bradbury's Dandelion Wine. Upon finishing your manuscript, you soaked it in a rusty bucket of piss and jitterbug perfume in the backyard for a few days. Then you let it dry in the sun, until the piss-smell is only evident within inches of the paper...

Ok, it's not all that bad. I read it all the way through, and enjoyed it for the most part. I found the style tiresome, but you may not. All the dialog is reported as if through the filter of a stoned college student. Of course that's the frame of mind the author may be trying to evoke, so I get it, I just don't like it that much.

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### **Charlotte says**

God, this book is gorgeous. I didn't know if I'd like it, since it is billed as being about friendships between boys, and that is not false billing, but the writing is great, and that tone a perfect mix of nostalgia and something else. Maybe pride? Maybe love?

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### **Brandon Will says**

Charts the course of one of those life-changing friendships. The kind that form and shape both involved, even when the friendship becomes little more than a reminder of what it used to be, and a gauge to how far life as moved as the horizons of adolescent possibility have narrowed into the present day what is.

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