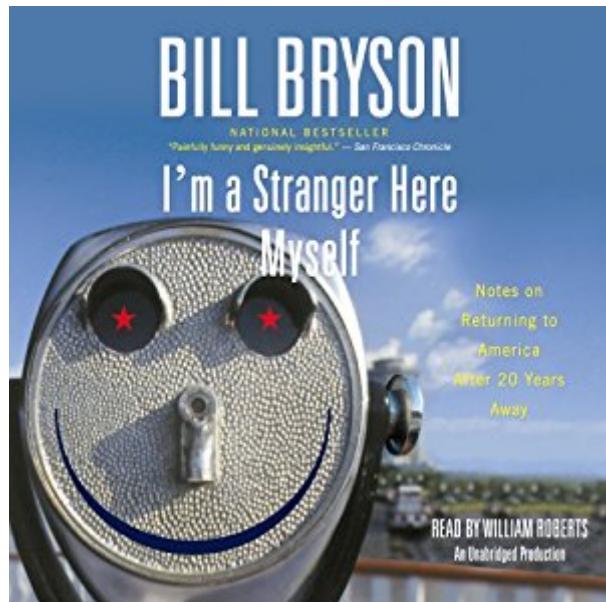


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I'm A Stranger Here Myself: Notes On Returning To America After Twenty Years Away



Synopsis

After living in Britain for two decades, Bill Bryson recently moved back to the United States with his English wife and four children (he had read somewhere that nearly 3 million Americans believed they had been abducted by aliens - as he later put it, "It was clear my people needed me"). They were greeted by a new and improved America that boasts microwave pancakes, 24-hour dental-floss hotlines, and the staunch conviction that ice is not a luxury item. Delivering the brilliant comic musings that are a Bryson hallmark, *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* recounts his sometimes disconcerting reunion with the land of his birth. The result is a book filled with hysterical scenes of one man's attempt to reacquaint himself with his own country, but it is also an extended, if at times bemused, love letter to the homeland he has returned to after 20 years away.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

About two years ago when my husband and I made up our minds to study abroad in the U.S., one of my friends, who have lived in Boston for many years recommended Bill Bryson's *I am a Stranger Here Myself* to me. She told me this book reflects American life and will help me learn American ways of living. I kept her words in mind, but didn't read this book until it was chosen as our assigned material in a reading class in the U.S. After reading through this book, I realized why my friend suggested me read it. This book is really a great comfort to foreigners, because what Bill Bryson told the readers mostly resonates with what we've encountered in our daily lives in the U.S. As foreigners, we usually assume that lack of proficiency in the language is the cause of ineffective communication and it puts us in a very awkward situation. However, in the chapter, "What's

Cooking," we know that though a native speaker, Bryson is also bewildered by the complicated terminology the server uses to introduce the special dishes in a fancy restaurant. And in "How to Rent a Car," Bryson has a difficult time figuring out the complexly tiered options in the contract just as I did when I rented a car in the U.S. for the first time. Sometime it makes foreigners feel secure and relieved when realizing that a native speaker is in the same boat. I am so glad that I got the chance to read this book. Not only did I understand more about American customs and culture, but I also benefited greatly from the author's funny expression and vivid description in English. For foreigners, making ourselves acquainted with American ways of thinking and speaking is crucial to dealing with daily events in a foreign country.

So what's this then? A collection of columns written by Bill Bryson for the British Night & Day magazine, assembled into a book? I was sceptical when I first picked it due to the unfamiliarity here; I thought he was a travel writer. But then I started reading through the first few pages and am delighted to report that they were so entertaining and accessible that I ended up finishing the book very satisfied. This book is about America, about consumerism, hypocrisy, politics, culture and everything else in between, such as motels and boring interstate highways and the condition of AT&T service these days. Why should all this be so interesting? Because Bill Bryson's voice shines throughout, dissecting normally more complex subjects into bite-sized articles which are eminently readable to the extent that it is at times impossible to stop. Of course, his trademark humour is present too. If you read this in public, there is the risk of embarrassment by your involuntary snorts of laughter. However, 'I'm a Stranger here Myself' isn't perfect. Much of the book is predictable, and 85% of the time, Bill appears to be complaining. Someone as talented as Bill Bryson should know not to engage in such indulgence because the end result is that the reader occasionally feels frustrated over the ostensible monotony. You also can't help but feel that an assemblage of brief columns is not enough to make a book. Although this book is not standard Bill Bryson fare, it still manages to excel. It really is exceptionally enlightening, to read what he has to say subsequent to spending 20 years in England.

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