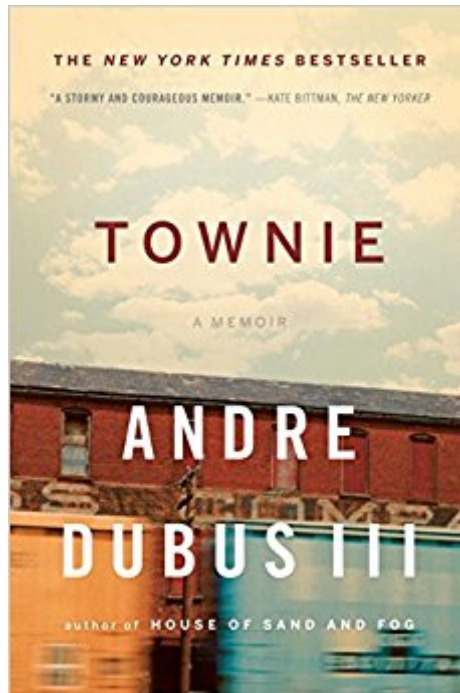




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Townie: A Memoir



Synopsis

Won Book of the Year Adult Non-Fiction • 2012 Indie Choice Awards Best Book of the Month February 2011 "Dubus relives, absent self-pity or blame, a life shaped by bouts of violence and flurries of tenderness." • Vanity Fair After their parents divorced in the 1970s, Andre Dubus III and his three siblings grew up with their overworked mother in a depressed Massachusetts mill town saturated with drugs and everyday violence. Nearby, his father, an eminent author, taught on a college campus and took the kids out on Sundays. The clash between town and gown, between the hard drinking, drugging, and fighting of "townies" and the ambitions of students debating books and ideas, couldn't have been more stark. In this unforgettable memoir, acclaimed novelist Dubus shows us how he escaped the cycle of violence and found empathy in channeling the stories of others • bridging, in the process, the rift between his father and himself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, February 2011: Rarely has the process of becoming a writer seemed as organic and--dare I say it--moral as it does in Andre Dubus III's clear-eyed and compassionate memoir, *Townie*. You might think that following his father's trade would have been natural and even obvious for the son and namesake of Andre Dubus, one of the most admired short story writers of his time, but it was anything but. His father left when he was 10, and as his mother worked long hours to keep them fed, her four children mostly raised themselves, stumbling through house parties and street fights in their Massachusetts mill town, so cut off from the larger world that when someone mentioned "Manhattan" when Andre was in college he didn't know what they were talking

about. What he did know, and what he recalls with detailed intensity, were the battles in bars and front yards, brutal to men and women alike, that first gave him discipline, as he built himself from a fearful kid into a first-punch, hair-trigger bruiser, and then empathy, as, miraculously, he pulled himself back from the violence that threatened to define him. And it was out of that empathy that, wanting to understand the stories of the victims of brutality as well as those whose pain drove them to dish it out, he began to write, reconciling with his father and eventually giving us novels like *House of Sand and Fog* and now this powerful and big-hearted memoir. --Tom Nissley --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review. Long before he became the highly acclaimed author of *House of Sand and Fog*, Dubus shuffled and punched his way through a childhood and youth full of dysfunction, desperation, and determination. Just after he turned 12, Dubus's family fell rapidly into shambles after his father--the prominent writer Andre Dubus--not only left his wife for a younger woman but also left the family in distressing poverty on the violent and drug-infested side of their Massachusetts mill town. For a few years, Dubus escaped into drugs, embracing the apathetic "no-way-out" attitude of his friends. After having his bike stolen, being slapped around by some of the town's bullies, and watching his brother and mother humiliated by some of the town's thugs, Dubus started lifting weights at home and boxing at the local gym. Modeling himself on the Walking Tall sheriff, Buford Pusser, Dubus paid back acts of physical violence with physical violence. Ultimately, he decided to take up his pen and write his way up from the bottom and into a new relationship with his father. In this gritty and gripping memoir, Dubus bares his soul in stunning and page-turning prose. (Feb.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

In the 1960s, the young Dubus's started their lives together like many couples of the times. They were golden, with their intellect, their parties, and the life they were living. They were in love. But marriage and parenting four children would take their toll, and with the divorce, the children would watch their father walking away, while they were left behind, as many children of divorce are. Their lives would be more impoverished because of the financial strains of living with a single mom. Oftentimes there was not enough food in the house, and sometimes during the long hours that their mother was at work, the kids had to fend for themselves. And what they found to occupy themselves was often something disruptive. But nearby, the father, Andre Dubus, already a published author, would enjoy the writer's life, while teaching at a nearby college. He had many female companions, some of whom he married. And his time with his children felt like "dating" them,

a description he shared with them. As the oldest son and second child, young Andre would find that living in a series of poor mill towns in Massachusetts would be a kind of training ground for having to fight for what he wanted. And to stave off the bullying that seemed to follow him everywhere. But first he had to work out and develop the muscles he would need. Much of the story in *Townie: A Memoir* reveals what that life was like for the young boy, and how he eventually came to change how he looked at fighting; how he eventually learned how to deal with that rage that arose in him. In this excerpt, he shows us what that felt like: "Ever since I was a boy running from other boys, I'd been making myself into a man who did not flee, a man who planted his feet and waited for that moment when throwing a punch was the only thing to do, waited for that invisible membrane around me to fall away and I'd gather once again the nerve and will to shatter another's. But I had discovered a new membrane now. The one between what we think and what we see, between what we believe and what is." But it would take many years for young Andre to arrive at this place...and then only after he began writing in his notebooks and channeling his feelings into his writing. It would also be many years before father and son would develop a better relationship. Toward the end of the story, when Andre had just published the book *House of Sand and Fog*, the closeness between them would be stronger than ever. The story was riveting, even though the earliest sections that dealt with the rage and fighting were difficult to get through. The rewards that came in the second half of the book made having to slog through the violence worth it. Recommended for those who relish writer's memoirs, and especially for those who have enjoyed other works by this author. Four stars.

The best meditation on violence I have ever read. If you are a conscientious person and ever wonder what it feels like to be in a fight this is your book. It's an engrossing story of how the author came to understand violence, love, and family. Like Frank McCourt said "the happy childhood is hardly worth your while" this memoir is further proof of it. Dubus' story is not one of sentimentality but a difficult life with an aloof artistic father who he yearns to earn the admiration of, a mother who is loving but overworked, siblings that have their own crosses to bare, and the overwhelming weight of his bleak New England hometown. Smelling of cigarettes and Southern Comfort his teen and early twenties were as rough as the his suburb of Boston. Building up his muscles like armor, adorning to protect those he loves, and to assuage his feeling of impotence, Dubus makes himself into a fighter. But unlike other stories of street fighting there is no hint of braggadocio in this piece. He is not telling old war stories but trying to reverse engineer violence to understand its pull and limitations. Dubus was a shy and nervous child who made himself fight in order to fill a void he felt in himself that was

only later to be filled by writing. What was the void? That is not for me to answer but i will say that I'm glad that he did turn to writing because I truly love this book.

I just reread this memoir and I still love it. It helps that I'm familiar with some of the locations he writes about, such as Newburyport and Haverhill but he describes what they were like decades before I ever encountered them. What I love is his metamorphosis into a bruiser, through body building and boxing lessons, which teach him to penetrate that "invisible membrane" around a person's face when you're punching him, and then into something of an angry monster, and then into a somewhat more enlightened person when it comes to conflict resolution. It also comes to terms with his ambivalent relationship with his celebrity author father and how he grew up isolated from educated society when his father left the family to fend for himself. A great read.

As always, this author meets all expectations. I have enjoyed all of his books and look forward to all others. This books takes place during the early years of Mr. Dubus' life. His story is so "Dubus".

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