

READING

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE THUNDERBOLT KID

C

We didn't call it the kitchen in our house. We called it the Burns Unit¹.

'It's a bit burned,' my mother would say apologetically at every meal, presenting you with a piece of meat that looked like something – a much-loved pet, perhaps – salvaged from a house fire. 'But I think I scraped off most of the burned part,' she would add, overlooking that this included every bit of it that had once been flesh. Happily, all this suited my father. His palate responded to only two tastes – burned and ice cream – so everything was fine by him so long as it was sufficiently dark and not too startlingly flavourful. Theirs truly was a marriage made in heaven, for no one could burn food like my mother or eat it like my dad.

All our meals consisted of leftovers. My mother had a seemingly inexhaustible supply of foods that had already been to the table, sometimes repeatedly. Apart from a few perishable dairy products, everything in the fridge was older than I was, sometimes by many years. The rule of thumb seemed to be that if you opened the lid and the stuff inside didn't make you actually recoil, it was deemed OK to eat.

Both my parents had grown up in the Great Depression and neither of them ever threw anything away if they could possibly avoid it. My mother routinely washed and dried paper plates, and smoothed out for reuse spare aluminium foil. If you left a pea on your plate, it became part of a future meal. All our sugar came in little packets spirited out of restaurants in deep coat pockets, as did our jams, jellies, crackers, tartare sauces, some of our ketchup and butter, all of our napkins and a very occasional ashtray. One of the happiest moments in my parents' life was when maple syrup started to be served in small disposable packets and they could add those to the household hoard.

¹a burns unit is a special department in a hospital where burns victims are treated

1 Look at texts A–C and match them with text types 1–3 below.

- 1 an extract from the book
- 2 short description of the book
- 3 information about the author

2 **6D113** Read the questions and quickly find the correct answers in the text.

- 1 Bill Bryson is _____.
a British. b American. c Australian.
- 2 The texts are mainly about _____ of the author's books.
a all b one c some
- 3 *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid* is about _____.
a his children.
b life in Britain.
c his childhood.

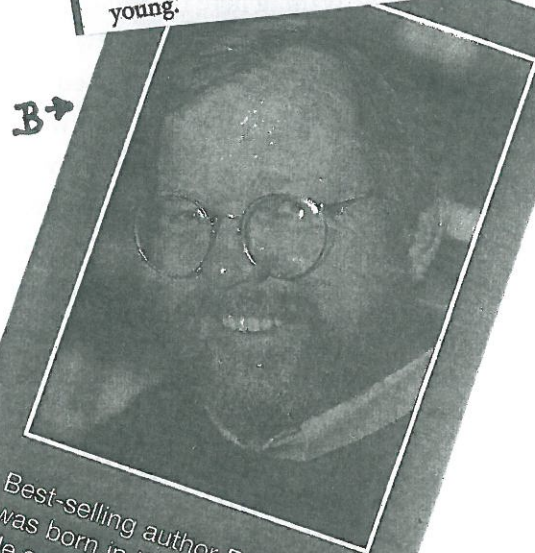
3 Read sentences 1–8 and then read text C. Are the statements true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 The Bryson family lived in a hospital.
- 2 His mother was a brilliant cook.
- 3 She occasionally burnt the food.
- 4 His father enjoyed the food his wife cooked.
- 5 His mother never threw food away.
- 6 His mother only served fresh food.
- 7 His parents wasted a lot of things.
- 8 His family used sugar, ketchup and other things taken from restaurants.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid
BY BILL BRYSON

In *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid* Bill Bryson adds another extremely funny volume to his autobiography. In this one he writes about the kid he used to be, and the strange world of 1950s America. Although this is a book about growing up in a particular time and place, Bryson makes it the story of anyone who has ever been young.



Best-selling author Bill Bryson was born in the USA in 1951. He settled in England in 1977, and lived for many years with his English wife and four children in North Yorkshire. He and his family then moved to America for a few years but have now returned to the UK. His numerous successful books include *The Lost Continent*, *Mother Tongue*, *Neither Here Nor There* and *A Short History of Nearly Everything*.

4 Find words 1–7 in text C and study the sentences they are in. Then match them with definitions a–h.

- 1 salvaged (v)
- 2 scraped (v)
- 3 flesh (n)
- 4 palate (n)
- 5 leftovers (n)
- 6 perishable (adj)
- 7 recoil (v)
- 8 spirited out (v)

- a a food that has not been eaten at the end of meal
- b the sense of taste
- c food which becomes bad quickly
- d to move back suddenly because you don't like something
- e to remove something from the surface with the edge of a knife
- f to take something quickly and secretly
- g saved from a bad situation
- h meat