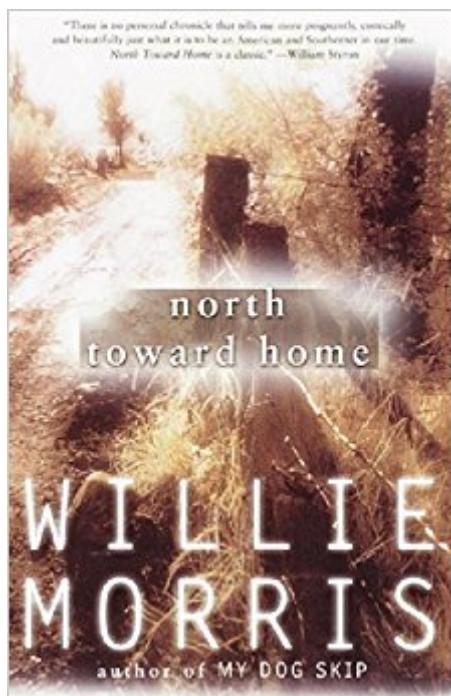


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# North Toward Home



## Synopsis

With his signature style and grace, Willie Morris, arguably one of this country's finest Southern writers, presents us with an unparalleled memoir of a country in transition and a boy coming of age in a period of tumultuous cultural, social, and political change. In *North Toward Home*, Morris vividly recalls the South of his childhood with all of its cruelty, grace, and foibles intact. He chronicles desegregation and the rise of Lyndon Johnson in Texas in the 50s and 60s, and New York in the 1960s, where he became the controversial editor of Harper's magazine. *North Toward Home* is the perceptive story of the education of an observant and intelligent young man, and a gifted writer's keen observations of a country in transition. It is, as Walker Percy wrote, "a touching, deeply felt and memorable account of one man's pilgrimage."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"*North Toward Home* is the finest evocation of an American boyhood since Mark Twain."--Sunday Times (London)"Vivid sketches of personas and places, moments when the spirit of things is caught with affecting precision.... And...prose that is extraordinarily clean, flexible and incisive."--The New York Times Book Review"*North Toward Home* is a classic."--William Styron

Willie Morris always wrote from the heart and with a generosity of spirit. His first book, *North Toward Home*, was published to extraordinary acclaim in 1967. It was to be his signature work, a memoir on which all his other books would pivot. In *North Toward Home* he found his voice and discovered his

identity. This self-styled "autobiography in mid-passage" is one man's emotional journey to understanding his own southern origins while reluctantly coming to regard the North as home. As Morris chronicles his own experiences during the nineteen forties, fifties, and sixties he also explains their relationship to the larger contemporaneous trends in America. And critics applauded. A New Republic reviewer noted that "it is this ambitious attempt to relate recent personal experience to history that gives *North Toward Home* its character and attraction." A writer for America went a step further. "It wasn't enough that in 1967, at the age of 32, Willie Morris became the editor of Harper's, the oldest and one of the most prestigious magazines in America. He had to compound our amazement by producing this autobiography, one of the best books of the year in any category." To honor and remember Willie Morris' literary legacy, this book is reissued in hardcover on the sixty-fifth anniversary of his birth--November 29, 1999--as a commemorative edition of a true American classic. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The late Mr. Morris was truly a gifted writer. This memoir is broken up into three sections; his childhood in Yazoo, Mississippi, the college years and early career in Texas, and finally, his move to New York City. Each area evokes strong images about their times. Though this classic memoir only entails the first thirty years of his life (circa 1935-1965), the author covers a great deal of ground in the political and social arenas. Southern and Northern racism, President Johnson, the John Birch Society, Senator Barry Goldwater, a private tour of the Oval Office, the ease in which demagogues could (and still do) manipulate the public are just a few of the topics covered. His section about commuting by train from the suburbs into New York City is a true work of art. Mr. Morris' brutally blunt recreations of his youth in Mississippi are astounding. His insight into bare-knuckles, myth-driven Texas politics should give anyone pause about voting in another President from the Lone Star State. The author's descriptions of the dehumanizing effects of working and living in New York City and hobnobbing in its snooty literary circles made me happy as hell to live in Maine. This nonfiction book is a sumptuous treat for the reader who is looking to better themselves. Though this masterpiece was published in 1967, it holds up extremely well. It's a darn shame the guy's dead.

I have never liked *Catcher in the Rye*. Perhaps it is not the book that is at fault but the undeserved reaction it gets. There are so many better boyhood memoirs (or books about boyhood alienation, whatever you want to call them), the best being *This Boy's Life* by Tobias Wolff. It's not only based on someone's actual life, but it speaks more deeply to the truth of the experience and it has a resolution. Wolff's character becomes a man-as must we all--unlike Salinger, who conveniently ends

the book before he has to deal with any of the themes he's created. Wolff also wrote two more books in this frame (essentially sequels) that I recommend. Read Old School first, and if you like that then try In Pharoah's Army. Recently I read Willie Morris' North Towards Home and liked it. Morris, clearly an exceptional boy, is a wonderful storyteller and documents unusual times. He seemed to be right on the edge of so many cultural shifts-he was raised in the South right before the Civil Rights Movement, went to college in Texas, studied politics at the height of Lyndon Johnson's transition from Congressional to executive power and finally moved to New York City to work as an editor at Harper's with some of the generation's finest writers. I personally liked the first half of the book better (mostly about his younger years) but the whole thing is worth reading. Finally, I must recommend Totto-Chan: The Little Girl at the Window. Totto Chan is one of Seth Robert's favorite books and though not technically about boyhood I think it speaks to the same themes. The book has sold something like 5 million copies in Japan which is insane. Totto-Chan is a special figure in modern Japanese culture-she is a celebrity on par with Oprah or Ellen, with a magazine, news show and exalted position to boot. The book describes a childhood in pre-WWII Japan as a poorly misunderstood girl who obviously suffered from attention disorders and excess energy. It wasn't until she met a special school principal-unlike any I have ever heard of-who finally GOT her. And I mean understood and cared about and unconditionally supported her in a way that both inspires me and makes me deeply jealous. If only all of us could be so lucky...

slow read but interesting

Morris was a master of this genre

INCREDIBLE READ!!! LOVE, LOVE Willie Morris!

After seeing the movie My Dog Skip, I bought this book to learn about a educated man who grew up in the South. I anticipated a recollection of why the South is great. What I read was a man recalling growing up in the South when it was a lazy, great place to grow up in. The first part of the book covers this and provided a perfect synopsis for the movie, My Dog Skip. The second part of the book covers his time in Texas where he attended college and stayed to become an editor of a local liberal paper. He also was the school paper editor who became famous for his liberal stances taking on the administration. While this section gets long, it is the most interesting section as Morris is thrown in a foreign environment, becomes quite intimidated as many freshman do, and then grows in the

process. This growth culminates in his acceptance as a Rhodes Scholar competing against many Ivy League namedroppers who once again intimidate him. He graduates and eventually writes for a liberal paper in Texas covering politics which allows him to see this magnificent state and challenge the beliefs of politicians and himself as he has grown into a full liberal in a very conservative state. Significant time is spent coloring the political landscape of the time and it's quite interesting to view this from 40 years hence. Anyone remember the John Birch Society? The final section was an evolution as he moves to New York, goes through the humiliating first job search before he finds a low paying job working for Harpers Magazine. He describes what it's like working in New York, which he calls the "Cave", and living in substandard conditions where the sun never hits his building. He describes his first literary party and the pompous attitude of these intellectuals, particularly about the rest of the country. This becomes the fascinating introspective part of the book as he parallels his life in the South and his existence living in the "Cave". This book covers the 40's, 50's and 60's so clearly race was a central theme as the civil rights movement was in boom causing him to challenge so much of what he knew growing up. I think this culminates when he asks a German woman to leave his apartment after she makes some mild racist Jewish remarks. Morris really struggled reconciling the race issue given his background in Mississippi and at one point when he was introduced, he said he was from North Carolina as he had become embarrassed to mention being from Mississippi. It's a fascinating story of personal growth that any reader will learn from. The book closes with him moving out of the Cave to a 70 mile, 4 hour commute daily to the city. And the last paragraph states the title "North Toward Home". I think many people will take the close differently but to me he was accepting his new home and turning over the page on the South which he would always appreciate and remember fondly. This book will be of interest to Southerners looking to learn about their heritage and what living in the South in the segregated 1940's was like. Also, people with interests in journalism and political history will enjoy the book. But this book is also good for anyone looking for personal growth through the writings of others. I recommend books on whether they are entertaining and whether I learn much. I was pleasantly entertained and learned a great deal. I strongly recommend this book.

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