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A witty memoir about the trials of adolescence, the tribulations of family life and the embarrassment that ensues from having larger-than-life parents

Neville and Liz Hodgkinson bought into the Thatcherite dream of home ownership, aspiration and advancement. The first children of their working class parents to go to university and have professional careers, they lived in a semi-detached house in Richmond, sent their sons Tom and Will to private school, and went on holiday to Greece once a year. Neville was an award-winning science writer and Liz was a high-earning tabloid hack.

Then a disastrous boat holiday, followed by a life-threatening bout of food poisoning from a contaminated turkey, led to the search for a new way of life.

Nev joined the Brahma Kumaris, who believe evolution is a myth, time is circular, and a forthcoming Armageddon will make way for a new Golden Age. Out went drunken dinner parties and Victorian décor schemes; in came large women in saris meditating in the living room and lurid paintings of smiling deities on the walls. Liz took the arrival of the Brahma Kumaris as a chance to wage all-out war on convention, from announcing her newfound celibacy on prime time television to writing books that questioned the value of getting married and raising children.

By an unfortunate coincidence, this dramatic and highly public transformation of the self coincided with the onset of Will's adolescence. This is his story.

The House is Full of Yogis Details

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From Reader Review The House is Full of Yogis for online ebook

Sydne says

This book starts out funny but I got half way through and couldn't pick it up again. I realized that I didn't care about any of the characters.

Caity says

I received this book for free from Goodreads first reads program.

This is a great story about growing up in an unconventional household. When the book starts they are a more typical family of four. Both parents are journalists and they have two sons one of whom is the author of this memoir. The family dynamic changes when the father Nev finds religion and their home literally fills with Yogis. It is really interesting to see how this changes the parents relationship as well as his relationships with his sons. This new found religion also changes the education Will receives which introduces some new and interesting characters. Overall this is a funny and fascinating memoir.

Sara says

I won my copy of The House is Full of Yogis free as part of the First Reads program. My initial thoughts: a well-written memoir with hilarious, off-the-wall characters that remind me of Augusten Burroughs' family from Running With Scissors. I felt compelled to Google the author's mother, Liz Hodgkinson, because she is just so different from any other mother I have ever met. I grew up in the 80s, albeit in the USA and not in England, but I don't remember anyone I know resembling this cast of characters in the slightest. Is it weird to think of the people in a memoir as "characters" rather than real, live individuals? Bottom line: a really funny, witty read, but it made me wonder: how well could the author, now in his 40s, really remember that period of his life? How accurate does a memoir need to be? Maybe I'm a bit cynical because my memory is crap and I can't remember what I did or said yesterday let alone when I was 10, but Hodgkinson chronicles his childhood in such detail from facial expressions, to what people were wearing, to what they were eating or drinking, to what was said, that I just kept thinking, "This is a fantastic story, but is it accurate?"

Justangie88 says

I'm about 20 pages from finishing, and I truly adore this book. The characters are all people you remember from your childhood - the older brother you're constantly in the shadow of, your first real crush, your best friend who always seems to be there without you ever realizing it. And you feel for Will because his life just happens to turn upside down at the exact moment when he feels the least stable. It's one of those books that is funny, warm and tender through and through. If you're reading it in public be prepared to embarrass yourself. You will laugh out loud.

Barbara says

It must be hard for the son of two writers to sit down and write a book but when those parents were as batshit crazy as Will Hodgkinson's it would be a crime not to put your childhood down on paper and let the world know why you are the way you are (and personally I have no idea how Will is, but there's no way he could have grown up 'normal', whatever that may be).

Liz and Nev Hodgkinson were living the aspirational middle-class 1980s dream when Nev got a mega-dose of food poisoning from a dodgy risotto and nearly died. Some might have vowed to stay away from chicken (or rice dishes) but Nev 'saw the light' and foresook normality to join a cult / sect / call it what you will called the Brahma Kumaris. A female-led group that was heavy on meditation and celibacy was clearly going to be a challenge for all the family.

Life both before and after Nev's Damascene conversion is wittily presented in 'The House is Full of Yogis'. From mum Liz getting carried away with feminism and nearly sinking the whole family on a pre-conversion river boat trip, to Nev giving up work to follow his new beliefs, nothing was ever entirely standard about family life. Throw in a highly progressive boarding school for Will where the less academically able kids of the well-to-do could go bonkers in the countryside, and you've got an amusing trip down memory lane.

I've seen reviews that have been very critical of Will's writing style. I don't really know what point was being made as I found it absolutely fine. The House if Full of Yogis is not high-literature but it's a fun read and an interesting look at how a family reacts to the father going more than a bit crazy renouncing most earthly pleasures whilst mum cranks out books on any subject the public will pay for. I rather enjoyed it.

Petra CigareX says

All gravy, no meat, nor onions or garlic. That describes both the diet of the Brahma Kumaris and this book. I read it because I was briefly involved with (and in the bad graces of) the same set of Brahma Kumaris but a decade or so later in the 90s.

One summer, back in the UK with my son, my house-mate, Lizzie, announced she had joined the Brahma Kumaris and would be moving out to live with them in their big Edwardian-style house just a short walk away. Lizzie was a teacher and deliberately androgenous looking with her short hair and boyish clothes. She was always confused whether she was heterosexual or a lesbian and had vague feelings of guilt about this. Perhaps joining a cult where all the women were princesses who wore white and never had sex of any kind was her solution.

She invited us to a Brahma Kumari garden party. The garden, huge and lovely, had all sorts of stands set up, one for food, another for massage, a little 'altar' with the point of light surrounded by a deep orange egg-shape for meditation, ones to entertain children and the one where I disgraced myself.

The main crowd were gathered around the levitation stand. One person was sitting down taking names and so I put mine down (I always say 'yes' to anything adventurous) and pushed forward to see what was happening. Some guy was lying down and there were all these Brahma Kumaris laying their hands on and meditating very hard (apparently) when there was a cheer. The 'victim' had levitated. All had seen him rise up into the air. Except me.

Had I missed the moment? I didn't say anything but watched the next person. It took quite a while, it wasn't a production line of one a minute into the air, back down, onto the next one on the list. This was heavy

spirituality, man. The next one also levitated and I didn't see that either. Everyone was overjoyed and smiling and nodding, wasn't it wonderful? I said I didn't seem him levitate, I said he didn't move at all. They tried to persuade me that I had seen it (huh?) and then said I didn't have the right frame of mind, I wasn't spiritual enough otherwise I would have seen it. Oh bollocks.

Anyway they wouldn't let me have my go at being levitated, and Lizzie drifted over in her white goddess outfit and suggested that it might be a good time for Daniel and I to leave. So we did, but we went by the cake table first and got some really nice jam sponge.

The next time Lizzie came to visit it was to tell us that she was going home to live with her parents in Surrey as she had MS. The Brahma Kumaris with their celibacy and strange ideas on food have continued to flourish on the contributions of their overwhelmingly middle-class and therefore quite high earning members. They've built a 'World University' for all to travel to and take courses. I wonder if there is a course in levitation? Or perhaps the most spiritual of yogis just fly in all by themselves.

The book was a story of growing up in a well-off, professional household - boarding school, bad holidays with the parents, camping with bullies, thieving, first girlfriends, losing virginity, university... The only thing out of the ordinary was his father, after nearly dying from food poisoning gave up his life (and ultimately money) to the Brahma Kumaris and his mother was a contentious Daily Mail journalist.

It was an ok book, nothing special, quite a lot of it bored me. Best thing about it was the writing, the author is a music journalist (as I was) and that might make a good book one day. Two and a half stars, rounded up because, you know, thanks for the memory.

Penny says

No doubt most children believe that part of a parent's role is to embarrass them. Will Hodgkinson's father Nev did it in spectacular style.

Will lived his early years with his older brother Tom in what sounded a fairly ordinary, middle class, suburban home in Richmond. Both parents were successful journalists. However, a dodgy chicken risotto at a dinner party changed everything - Nev had such a severe bout of food poisoning that he was hospitalised for several days and nearly died. As he recovered he fell under the spell of the Brahma Kumaris religious cult, resulting in him giving up his job, meditating and drifting around in white 'pyjamas' and sandals.

The father that he once had disappeared forever, and Will never stops mourning this throughout the book. Gone are the frozen pizzas and takeaways, being told off for not doing his maths homework, being checked up on whenever he goes out on his BMX bike, and all the family outings with his dad that he loved so much.

Instead he has a father who spends hours preparing vegetarian food, turning rooms into meditation areas, evangelising about the spiritual path, and of course filling the house with Yogis

The Brahma Kumaris believe evolution is a myth, time is circular, and a forthcoming Armageddon will make way for a new Golden Age. They also advocate celibacy - something Will finds impossible to consider as he approaches adolescence and falls in love with his friend's sister.

I could only imagine Will's horror when his father turned up at school in his white pyjamas "looking like a cross between Nicholas Parsons and Mahatma Gandhi", to give his class a lecture on meditation.

Very funny in parts, but also deeply affecting and honest in the portrayal of a much loved father.

Julie Mccann says

I love Will, his dad and his friend. His mum & brother less so. A fabulously humorous and heartbreaking autobiography of an adolescent boy doing his best to make sense of the increasingly bizarre world around him.

Kelli says

Will Hodgkinson's account of becoming a teen in London is clever and humorously written. Will's mother was a staunch feminist and his father Nev was an easy-going man and a great father. After a particularly bad bout of food poisoning, Nev goes off to Florida to recover and comes into contact with the Brahma Kumaris and life changes for the entire family. Suddenly, Nev takes on the calm meditating ways of the BK, the family moves to another home and Will is off to boarding school. The stories of what happens along the way from pre-teen to full fledged teen years is funny and interesting. The book got a little tedious in parts when describing the BK beliefs, but that information was necessary to understand the events in the story.

Leslie Soifer says

Hodgkinson's story is outrageous and a great read. As a memoir, he sets the stage in the 80's in a suburban middle-class British family. His is a reflection of growing up in a relative normal family until his father becomes part of the Bramhma Kumaris and life the way Hodkinson knew turns upside down in comical, hilarious, disturbances and confusion. As an adolescent viewpoint is riddled with making sense of his entering into this new lifestage and starking contrast to his father's yogi lifestyle. A challenge to adopt two competing value systems and incorporate them into a healthy outcome.

David says

Entertaining account by Will Hodgkinson who grew up in London in the 80s, and whose father became a convert to Brahma Kumaris. Some of the practices and beliefs of the Brahma Kumaris are outlined, along with a coming-of-age story set in a distinctive time and place. Never a dull moment and plenty of entertaining English humour.

Bookworm says

Perhaps it was funny only to the author. Will Hodgkinson, son of a two well to do parents (science writer and tabloid reporter), lived a fairly privileged life--going to private school, visiting Greece for holiday once a year, and the like. But his dad, Nev, came down with a severe case of food poisoning and joined the Brahma Kumaris , where he makes vegetarian food, destroys the relatively well life the family has.

This was advertised as a hilarious book and I put it on my list because of an NPR interview that made it sound hilarious. But it really isn't. Having just recently read 'Gone Clear' (which is about Scientology), I couldn't help be somewhat disturbed at some of the behaviors and patterns the author's father displayed, including giving away large amounts of money to the BKs (as Hodgkinson often calls them), deciding to sell the family's house, etc.

Hodgkinson's mother at the end finally puts her foot down and divorces Nev because he attempted to create a will where if she died after he did, proceeds from the house sale would go to the BKs. And she points out various aspects that made her think it was a cult: not being allowed to have sex with anyone (whereas in others you can have sex with as many people as you want!) that the BKs were more important to him than his own family (Nev cuts both Will and Will's brother Tom out of the will and leaves his estate to the BKs).

I could not understand how this was supposed to be funny, although the author and his brother don't seem to be much badly off for it. I didn't get why mom (mum since they're British :)) Liz put up with this or how could Nev not understand he put the BKs ahead of his own children.

It wasn't an enjoyable book at all. There are some parts that are mildly amusing but I agree with a few other reviews: the author isn't great at comedic writing and many parts of the story came out to be rather sad than anything else. Skip it.

Minka Guides says

Hands down, one of the funniest and most fascinating autobiographical tales I have read since David Sedaris.

I'm pretty terrible at telling jokes but I had my partner in stitches trying to recount the fireworks incident. A very lovely book. This will definitely be the holiday read I recommend to all my friends this summer.

Sophie Patrikios says

Fascinating story with so much comedy potential it's a shame to let someone without any comedic ability write it up, even if they are the person it happened to.

Wendy says

I received this as a GoodReads Giveaway.
