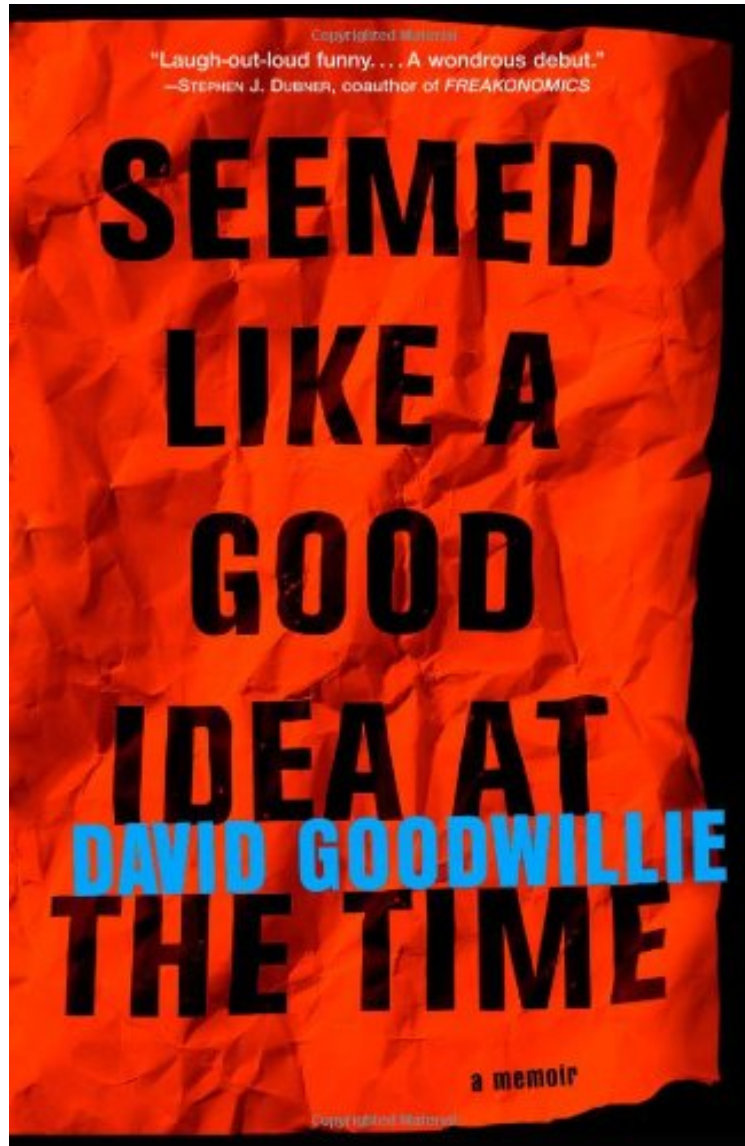


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Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time: A Memoir

David Goodwillie

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David Goodwillie : Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time: A Memoir before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time: A Memoir:

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the following review helpful. At times, brilliant. But in the end, it falls short. By Shawn S. Sullivan Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time, by David Goodwillie is one of those books that at times fascinates the reader with insight, pace and plot. At other times one wonders why the author and his editors included often tedious and disjointed chapters that far from enhance this memoir of New York. As a native New Yorker, and one who lived there before and during the author's coming-of-age in the Big City novel, I usually am biased and get a kick out of these types of reads. New York is like no other place - that is clearly true. But one cannot help but sense that Goodwillie was reaching for a McInerney-type of novel, or perhaps even a shorter Tom Wolfe's style of New Journalism. Sadly, Goodwillie, who at times in this book is clearly brilliant, falls short. When writing in a more reflective and less journalistic manner is when the author is at his best. And there was plenty of that. Unfortunately, just when he grabbed my attention with his own style, his editor seemingly either allowed, or even encouraged, some unrelated drivel to waste several pages, if not chapters. If he had cut out about 50 to 75 pages and focused more on the personal and societal implications of an individual trying to cut it in New York in the Age of the Internet (and its conflict with his desires as a writer) this book could have been very good. It was not.

Fresh out of college and following a brief and disastrous stint playing minor league baseball, David Goodwillie moves to New York intent on making his mark as a writer. Arriving in Manhattan in the mid-nineties, Goodwillie quickly falls into one implausible job after another. He becomes a private investigator, imagining himself as a gumshoe, a hired gun only to realize that he's more adept at bungling cases than at solving them. When, in his stint as a freelance journalist, he unveils the Mafia in a magazine exposé, he succeeds only in becoming a target of their wrath. As a copywriter for a sports auction house, he imagines documenting the great histories hidden in priceless artifacts but finds himself forced to write about a lock of Mickey Mantle's hair. Even when he seems to break through, somehow becoming the sports expert at Sotheby's auction house appearing on major news networks, raking in a hefty salary he's lured away by the promise of Internet millions...just in time for the dot-com crash. Teeming with the vibrancy of a city in hyperdrive, Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time recounts a dizzying and enthralling search for authenticity in a cynical, superficial and suddenly dangerous age. In his heartbreaking and hilarious struggle to become a big-city writer, Goodwillie becomes something more: an important voice of the lost generation he so elegantly describes.

From Publishers Weekly Goodwillie's chronicle of his New York days and nights in the exuberant years of the late 1990s can be accurately characterized by its own title. A 1995 graduate of Kenyon College, the author failed at a Cincinnati Reds tryout, then went East for the big city's bright lights (comparisons to Jay McInerney's 1985 classic are unavoidable). During his days, Goodwillie changed jobs private investigator, copywriter, journalist, sports expert the way free agents change teams; by night, he swung with the best of them whatever the venue, whatever the side: neocon right or Clintonian left; Upper West or Lower East. The author wisely depicts himself as ironist in part, and he exuberantly relates episode after episode. However, the matters of his steady job, housing and relationships (or lack thereof) never quite cohere into memorable drama. Still, finely wrought details anchor the story in time and place, and perhaps the work's lack of moral weight is the truest mark of the decade it portrays. Goodwillie has written a frenetic picaresque with little soul but lots of rhythm. (June 2) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From School Library Journal Adult/High School When the author graduated from college, he tried out for the Cincinnati Reds. He failed to make the team, so he took what was to him the next logical step: he moved to New York City to become a writer. This memoir details the sometimes unsettling, frequently hilarious events in between. Goodwillie first worked as a private investigator and then as a copywriter for a sports auction house, which led to a prestigious job at Sotheby's organizing and then auctioning a huge private baseball-memorabilia collection. The second half of the 1990s saw the rise of the dot-coms, and, though Goodwillie was reasonably happy and earning a steady and adequate paycheck, he was seduced by the glitz, mad creativity, and possibility of instant wealth of the Internet start-ups. He worked for a series of these companies, all of which failed to flourish. His personal relationships also lacked commitment, and it wasn't until the horrifying events of September 11th that he began to reflect on the direction his life was taking. After six years of gathering material, he finally decided to write. Goodwillie's pre-9/11 New York was a city of exuberance and seemingly endless possibility. This picaresque tale also tells of lean times between jobs, run-down apartments, nightlife, and superficial relationships. Short on analysis but with plenty of fresh experience, it provides a detailed view of life in the recent past. Susanne Bardelson, Kitsap Regional Library, WA Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Fresh from a solid liberal-arts/baseball education, Goodwillie attempted to land a spot on the Cincinnati Reds. Tryouts ended after two swings of the bat, one a foul ball and the other a meek, broken-bat dribbler that didn't quite make it out of the infield. So he moved to New York to live the life of a writer, more a lifestyle choice than creative endeavor, which followed a comparable groundout trajectory. He was invariably sidetracked by the requisite glitz, drugs, and stalled relationships the city abundantly offers but somehow landed a job at Sotheby's, auctioning off the world's largest private collection of baseball memorabilia. It was wildly successful, and Goodwillie tried to parlay his good fortune into the emerging Internet economy, with a series of startup companies that

never got far beyond their initial handout of stock options, while worrying that his career as a writer might share a similarly tenuous foothold. After six years spent wondering if he has anything to say, he has certainly amassed enough raw, dizzying experience for this memoir of the World's City lurching into a new millennium. Ian Chipman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved