



American Stories

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Calvin Trillin's range as a writer capable of honing in on the heart of any matter and then of examining that heart both with surgical precision and human understanding is the ability that sets him apart. Lots of writers leap from subject to subject with ease, but Trillin's interest isn't so much covering the territory as it is loving the interior landscapes of everyday folks whose human needs cause them to rise or fall, as celebrities or criminals, in rhythms we recognize as our own.

In "Outdoor Life" Trillin portrays the poignant tragedy of an emotionally needy boy and man. He details how their needs destroy each other when Louis Conner kills Edwin Dyer for sexually molesting him. "Zei-da-man," the story of John Zeidman, an American college student who died from an insect bite while attending school in China brings home how often we recognize real heroes for the wrong reasons, and confirms the tenacity of the human spirit, even after death.

In his "Afterward" Trillin writes, "I wanted to tell you the sort of stories you might tell in front of a fire...." What Trillin wanted is precisely what he achieved, and although each story stands alone, its characters immortalized by Trillin's elegant prose, the author adds in his "Afterward" a follow-up paragraph for each story, a true denouement or post mortem of his characters' lives since he captured episodes of their existence that illuminate their lives. AMERICAN STORIES exemplifies the diversity of human types and the unity of human need, and in prose that sings like poetry, celebrates human life.

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