



Ticket to Childhood: A Novel

By Nguyen Nhat Anh

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Ticket to Childhood: A Novel By Nguyen Nhat Anh

In the tradition of *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Clumbled Out the Window and Disappeared*, the most popular book in Vietnamese history?a charming novel about what we lose when we grow up.

The bestselling book in the history of modern Vietnam, *Ticket to Childhood* has been nothing short of a sensation in its home country: it has sold over 350,000 copies and has gone through 35 printings. *Ticket to Childhood* is a story that captures the texture of childhood in all of its richness. Narrated by a man looking back, we learn of the small miracles and tragedies that made up the narrator's life?the misadventures and the misdeeds?we meet his long-lost friends, none of whom can forget how rich their lives once were. And even if Nguyen Nhat Anh can't take us back to our own childhoods, he captures those innocent times with a great deftness. A fable that will charm adults and move children, *Ticket to Childhood* is sure to capture the hearts of American readers. Now in paperback.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This charming short work recalls *The Little Prince* in its depiction of childhood sensibilities pitted against an often illogical and absurd adult world . . . Conveyed in sparse prose, the insights are often simple but they ring true, and their effect is sweet and endearing." —*Publishers Weekly*

"A compelling if conflicted portrait of modern-day Vietnam . . . While using allegory to voice his political dissatisfaction, Anh downplays its impact by suggesting that restless citizens are nothing but pampered children . . . A startlingly vivid portrait of 21st-century Vietnam and its growing pains." —*Shelf Awareness*

"The best-selling book in the history of modern Vietnam, this first English translation of *Ticket to Childhood* marks the arrival of a hugely appealing and engaging author." —*The New Criterion*

About the Author

Nguyen Nhat Anh is an acclaimed writer who has published many stories and novels for adults and children, though *Give Me a Ticket to Childhood* is his first book to appear in English. He has won many prizes, including the Southeast Asian Writers Award. He lives in Ho Chi Minh City.

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"Give me a ticket to childhood ..."

—ROBERT ROJDESVENSKY

1. When the day is done

One day, I suddenly realized that life was dull and boring.

The first time this happened, I was eight.

I had the same feeling at fifteen, when I failed my high school entrance exam; at twenty-four, when I got my heart broken; at thirty-three, when I lost my job; and at forty, when I was fully employed and happily married, but then it didn't matter.

There are many shades of boredom, though, and eight was a dark year: I felt that the future had nothing in store for me.

Many years later, I would discover that philosophers had, for millennia, been turning their minds inside out like a pocket looking for the meaning of life, to no avail. But when I was eight, I understood: there was nothing new out there.

The same sun shone every day; the same curtain of darkness dropped every night; the wind in the eaves, and in the trees, moaned the same moans; the same birds sang their same songs; the crickets always chirped the same chirping; and it was true for the chickens squawking the same squawks. In short, all of life was of a

sameness: worn out and dull.

Before going to bed every night, I knew for sure what the next day would bring.

Let me tell you: In the morning, I would try my best not to get out of bed. I would pretend to be fast asleep, ignoring my mother's voice and lying there like a log while she shook my shoulders and tickled my feet. Once she roused me, I had to go brush my teeth and wash my face before being forced to sit at the breakfast table, listlessly chewing on something disgusting. My mother's major concern was to make me (and the whole family, for that matter) eat balanced meals, whereas the only food I really liked—instant noodles—she considered junk.

It is good to care about your health, obviously, especially as you get older. Who would deny it? Not me. A journalist once asked me which of humanity's most common cares worried me the most: health, love, or money. Love, I said, was first, and health was second, and money can't buy either, or so they say.

But that's for adults to think about. At eight, I didn't like to eat balanced meals, and was forced to eat them, which I did reluctantly, which is why my mother always complained about me.

After finishing breakfast, I'd hurry to find my schoolbooks and to load my backpack. I'd find one book on top of the TV, another on the refrigerator, and still another buried in a pile of bedding. Of course I'd forget something, as I always did. And then I'd dash out of the house.

I walked to school, because it was near my house, but I never had a chance to enjoy the walk—I always had to run because I always got up late, brushed my teeth late, ate breakfast late, and wasted a lot of time searching for my stuff. Of this cycle my father said: "Son, when I was your age, I always neatly loaded my backpack the night before, so the next morning, I just grabbed it!" I don't know if this was true or not—I obviously wasn't around at the time—but now that I'm my father's age, I say the same thing to my kids. I also boast about hundreds of other sensible things that I also never actually did. Sometimes, for our own reasons, we make up a story about our past, and keep repeating it until we can't remember that we made it up, and if we continue to tell the same story over and over, we end up believing it.

Anyway, as I said, that's adult stuff.

Now back to my story about being eight.

I always took a seat in the back of the classroom. It was a gloomy spot, but it gave me the chance to chat, argue, or play tricks without fear of being caught by the teacher. But the best thing about sitting in the back was that the teacher never called me to the front to recite a lesson.

How did I get away with this? Think about it: you probably have a lot of friends who aren't on your mind all the time, right? Our memories have limited storage space, like a closet, so the names and faces that don't get a lot of use are stored in the back, where you forget them until you see a familiar face on the street. Then, suddenly, you remember they exist. "Hey, weird—I haven't seen him for ages," you think. "Last year, when I was broke, he lent me a twenty."

Likewise with my teacher: out of sight, out of mind. The thick hedge of dark heads in front of me blocked her view of my face, which obstructed her recall of my name, so she forgot to call on me.

Here's how we referred to school in those days: *wearing out the seat of your pants*, because we spent so much time sitting on a hard bench. (But let's not be coy—let's call it what it really was: *jail*.) I didn't like a single subject: not math, not calligraphy, not reading, not dictation. I only liked recess.

Who was the adult benefactor that invented recess? What a genius! Recess is an open door. It's an open door in your brain that lets the teacher's droning whoosh out like so much hot air, and it's the door of a cage that frees you to forget your cares.

My friends and I spent those precious moments of freedom playing football or marbles. More often, though, we got our thrills from chasing each other, fighting, or wrestling until the neatly-groomed students who had sat so quietly wearing out their pants looked like a bunch of hooligans with bloody knuckles and black eyes, dressed in their mothers' dishrags.

Maybe you're wondering why, under the circumstances, I don't tell a story about the fun we had after school. That's because there wasn't any. We just went from one form of house arrest to another.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Cameron Trammell:

Now a day people that Living in the era exactly where everything reachable by match the internet and the resources included can be true or not need people to be aware of each info they get. How individuals to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the answer then is reading a book. Looking at a book can help people out of this uncertainty Information specifically this Ticket to Childhood: A Novel book since this book offers you rich details and knowledge. Of course the information in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

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