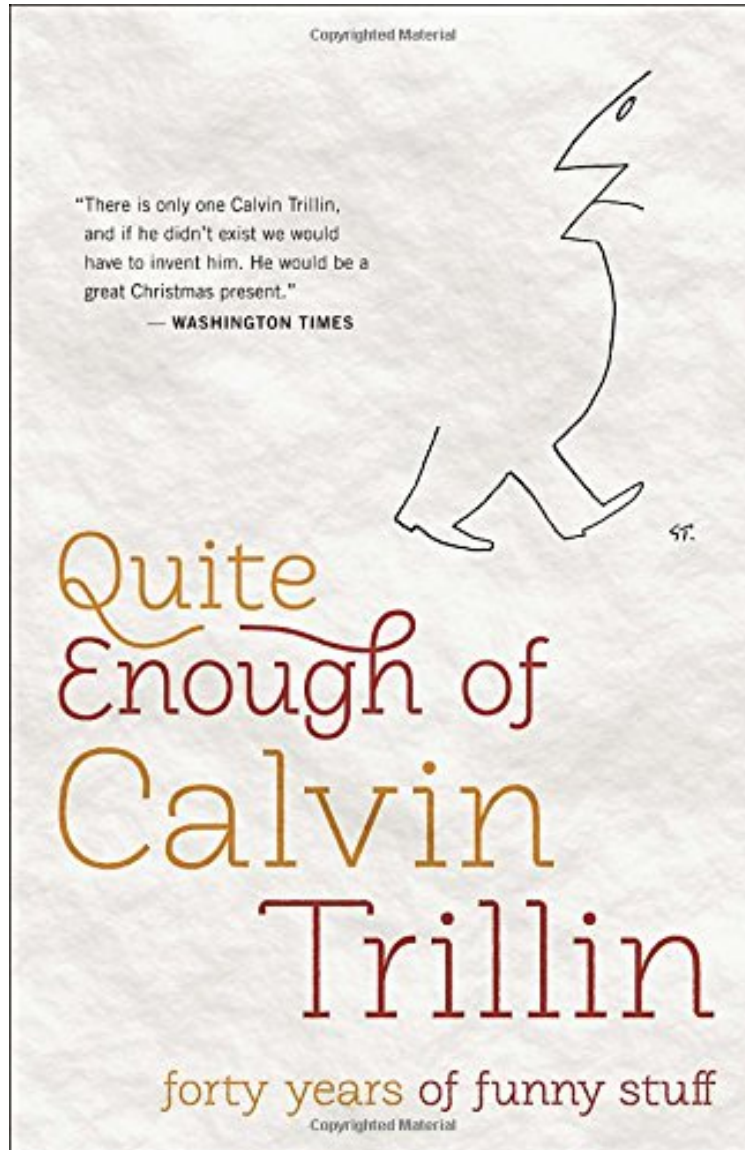


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Quite Enough of Calvin Trillin: Forty Years of Funny Stuff

Calvin Trillin

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#451433 in Books Calvin Trillin 2012-12-04 2012-12-04 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .80 x 5.201, .60 #File Name: 0812982215368 pages Quite Enough of Calvin Trillin Forty Years of Funny Stuff | File size: 49.Mb

Calvin Trillin : Quite Enough of Calvin Trillin: Forty Years of Funny Stuff before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Quite Enough of Calvin Trillin: Forty Years of Funny Stuff:

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful. Good for old Trillin fans, new ones should try his other books first By Contrarian If you are an old Trillin fan (as I am) you'll enjoy this. If you are not, especially if you are not old enough to remember Tom Delay, Rodney King and George H.W. Bush you will do better with other books he's

written. The material goes back 40 years (mostly in the later half of that period but still not recent). I would rate the following Trillin books 5 stars: - American Stories - All About Alice - Messages from my Father: A Memoir - Tummy Trilogy (if you want to read Trillin's writing about food). Why doesn't let me indent this list? 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A great collection. By Bemused Prof. When I moved to a city apartment with no space I had to unload 95% of my books, a painful process. Still, I kept all of my Calvin Trillin books. I have enjoyed his dry humor and wonderful analyses, and some of his deadline poetry, for well over 30 years now. On reading this collection from throughout his career it is obvious that he (at least on the chosen pieces) does not lose anything with age. Actually, this ISN'T quite enough of Trillin, because his food pieces are missing, and his longer "on-the-road" essays are missing, although both are easily available in other anthologies. After this, I would read The Tummy Trilogy. One highly impressive thing about Trillin is that although he presents himself as the less than fully aware husband and father, and his humor often plays off his wife and daughters, it would be hard to find any place where they come off second best. Not many men were writing like that 30 or 40 years ago, while being witty, smart and interesting all at the same time. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Classic American Humor. One of the best! By T. O'Rourke. Calvin Trillin is an American treasure, with his photo next to the definition of "droll." Every one of these short articles amuses. He has been a lot of places and done a lot of things and makes the most of all of them. Great for the beach, while dining with your family, long trips, and at work, as long as you can keep from laughing out loud. Good luck with that.

"Brilliant . . . The dean of American comic writers showcases his varied talents mocking the public and private lives of politicians, average citizens and himself."—The Star-Ledger. Calvin Trillin has committed blatant acts of funniness all over the place—in The New Yorker, in one-man off-Broadway shows, in his "deadline poetry" for The Nation, in comic novels, and in what USA Today called "simply the funniest regular column in journalism." Now Trillin selects the best of his funny stuff and organizes it into topics like high finance ("My long-term investment strategy has been criticized as being entirely too dependent on Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes") and the literary life ("The average shelf life of a book is somewhere between milk and yogurt"). He addresses the horrors of witnessing a voodoo economics ceremony and the mystery of how his mother managed for thirty years to feed her family nothing but leftovers ("We have a team of anthropologists in there now looking for the original meal"). He even skewers deserving political figures in poetry. In this, the definitive collection of his humor, Calvin Trillin is prescient, insightful, and invariably hilarious. "A literary treasure . . . There is only one Calvin Trillin, and if he didn't exist we would have to invent him."—The Washington Times. "Funny is to Trillin what drinking is to Uncle Jed in Annie Get Your Gun—it's what he does 'natur'lly.' He's also a lot more than funny. Quite Enough of Calvin Trillin is the twenty-eighth book he's published over not far short of a half-century, and their range of subjects is remarkable."—Jonathan Yardley, The Washington Post. "Trillin made his reputation over four decades as the author of 'U.S. Journal' in the New Yorker [but he] is incapable of resisting the temptation of comedy. The jokes kept on welling up and Mr. Trillin made a parallel reputation as a writer of funny stuff."—The Economist. "Wry, whip-smart, understated, and entertaining."—The Miami Herald.

Praise for Calvin Trillin "A classic American humorist."—The New Republic. "I spent my college years deep into the great humorists: Benchley, Perelman, Woody Allen. Calvin Trillin is up there with any of them."—David Brooks, The Daily Beast. "Trillin may be the funniest columnist in America—bemused, amused, wry and right on the mark."—People. From the Hardcover edition. About the Author. A longtime staff writer at The New Yorker, Calvin Trillin is also The Nation's deadline poet. His bestsellers range from the memoir About Alice to Obviously On He Sails: The Bush Administration in Rhyme. He lives in Greenwich Village, which he describes as "a neighborhood where people from the suburbs come on weekends to test their car alarms." From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. BIOGRAPHICALLY SPEAKING. "I've found that a lot of people say they're from Kansas City when they aren't. Just for the prestige." Chubby. It's common these days for memoirs of childhood to concentrate on some dark secret within the author's ostensibly happy family. It's not just common; it's pretty much mandatory. Memoir in America is an atrocity arms race. A memoir that reveals incest is trumped by one that reveals bestiality, and that, in turn, is driven from the bestseller list by one that reveals incestuous bestiality. When I went into the memoir game, I knew I was working at a horrific disadvantage: As much as I would hate this getting around in literary circles in New York, the fact is that I had a happy childhood. At times, I've imagined how embarrassing this background would be if I found myself discussing childhoods with other memoirists late at night at some memoirist hangout. After talking about their own upbringings for a while—the glue-sniffing and sporadically violent grandmother, for instance, or the family tapeworm—they look toward me. Their looks are not totally respectful. They are aware that I've admitted in print that I never heard my parents raise their voices to each other. They have reason to suspect, from bits of information I've let drop from time to time, that I was happy in high school. I try desperately to think of a dark secret in my upbringing. All I can think of is Chubby, the collie dog. "Well, there's Chubby, the collie dog," I say, tentatively. "Chubby, the collie dog?" they repeat. There really was a collie named

Chubby. I wouldn't claim that the secret about him qualifies as certifiably traumatic, but maybe it explains an otherwise mysterious loyalty I had as a boy to the collie stories of Albert Payson Terhune. We owned Chubby when I was two or three years old. He was sickly. One day Chubby disappeared. My parents told my sister, Sukey, and me that he had been given to some friends who lived on a farm, so that he could thrive in the healthy country air. Many years later-as I remember, I was home on vacation from college-Chubby's name came up while my parents and Sukey and I were having dinner. I asked why we'd never gone to visit him on the farm. Sukey looked at me as if I had suddenly announced that I was thinking about eating the mashed potatoes with my hands for a while, just for a change of pace. "There wasn't any farm," she said. "That was just what they told us. Chubby had to be put to sleep." "Put to sleep!" I said. "Chubby's gone?" "Somebody-my mother, I think-pointed out that Chubby would have been gone in any case, since collies didn't ordinarily live to the age of eighteen. "Isn't it sort of late for me to be finding this out?" I said. "It's not our fault if you're slow on the uptake," my father said. I never found myself in a memoirist gathering that required me to tell the story of Chubby, but, as it happened, I did relate the story in a book. A week or so later, I got a phone call from Sukey. "The collie was not called Chubby," she said. "The collie was called George. You were called Chubby." 1998 Geography Geography was my best subject. You can imagine how I feel when I read that the average American high school student is likely to identify Alabama as the capital of Chicago. I knew all the state capitals. I knew major mineral resources. Missouri: lead and zinc. (That's just an example.) I learned so many geographical facts that I've had to spend a lot of time in recent years trying to forget them so I'll have room in my brain for some things that may be more useful. I don't hold with the theory that everyone is just using a little bit of his gray matter. I think we're all going flat out. For instance, I've worked hard to forget the longest word in the English language, which I had to learn for a high school club. Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis. It isn't a word that's easy to work into conversations. There are only so many times you can say, "Speaking of diseases usually contracted through the inhalation of quartz dust . . ." I finally managed to forget how to spell it, and I was able to remember my Army serial number. I think my interest in geography grew from the long automobile trips across the country I used to take with my family as a child. I grew up in Kansas City, which is what the real estate people would call equally convenient to either coast. We usually went west. My father would be in the front seat, pointing out buttes and mesas, and my sister, Sukey, and I would be in the back, protecting our territory. We had an invisible line in the center of the seat. At least, Sukey said it was in the center. There were constant border tensions. It was sort of like the border between Finland and the old Soviet Union. I played Finland. Sukey played the Soviet Union. Then my father did something that we now know was politically retrograde and maybe antifeminist. He told me, "We do not hit girls. You will never hit your sister again." Sukey was not visited with a similar injunction. So I became a unilaterally disarmed Finland, while she was a Soviet Union bristling with weaponry. If I hadn't had to be on constant alert because of Sukey's expansionist backseat policy, I might now know the difference between a butte and a mesa. If I had followed my geographical bent, I would have become a regionalist, a geographer who decides where to draw the lines dividing the regions of the United States, like the Midwest and the South and the New England states. Actually, I do the same sort of thing, without a degree, except I only use two regions-partly because of my math. Math was my worst subject. I was never able to convince the mathematics teacher that many of my answers were meant ironically. Also, I had trouble with pi, as in "pi squared." Some years ago, the Texas State Legislature passed a resolution to change pi to an even three. And I was for it. The way I divide up the country, the first region is the part of the United States that had major league baseball before the Second World War. That's the Ancien United States, or the Old Country. The rest of the United States is the rest of the United States-or the Expansion Team United States. For those of you who didn't follow baseball closely in 1948, there's an easy way to know whether you're in the Old Country or the Expansion Team United States. In the Old Country, the waiters in an Italian restaurant have names like Sal or Vinnie. If you're in an Italian restaurant and the waiter's name is Duane, you're in the Expansion Team United States. 1988 Spelling Yiffniff My father used to offer an array of prizes for anyone who could spell yiffniff. That's not how to spell it, of course-yiffniff. I'm just trying to let you know what it sounds like, in case you'd like to take a crack at it yourself. Don't get your hopes up: This is a spelling word that once defied some of the finest twelve-year-old minds Kansas City had to offer. The prizes were up for grabs any time my father drove us to a Boy Scout meeting. After a while, all he had to say to start the yiffniff attempts was "Well?" "Y-i . . .", some particularly brave kid like Dogbite Davis would say. "Wrong," my father would say, in a way that somehow made it sound like "Wrong, dummy." "How could I be wrong already?" Dogbite would say. "Wrong," my father would repeat. "Next." Sometimes he would begin the ride by calling out the prizes he was offering: ". . . a new Schwinn three-speed, a trip to California, a lifetime pass to Kansas City Blues baseball games, free piano lessons for a year, a new pair of shoes." No matter what the other prizes were, the list always ended with "a new pair of shoes." Some of the prizes were not tempting to us. We weren't interested in shoes. We would have done anything to avoid free piano lessons for a year. Still, we were desperate to spell yiffniff. "L-l . . .", Eddie Williams began one day. "Wrong," my father said when Eddie had finished. "Next." "That's Spanish," Eddie said, "the double L that sounds like a y." "This is English," my father said. "Next." Sometimes someone would ask what yiffniff meant. "You don't have to give the definition to get the prizes," my father would say. "Just spell it." As far as I could gather, yiffniff didn't have a definition. It was a word that existed solely to be spelled. My father had invented it for

that purpose. Occasionally some kid in the car—usually, the contentious Dogbite Davis—would make an issue out of yiffniff's origins. "But you made it up!" he'd tell my father, in an accusing tone. "Of course I made it up," my father would reply. "That's why I know how to spell it." "But it could be spelled a million ways." "All of them are wrong except my way," my father would say. "It's my word." If you're thinking that my father, who had never shared the secret of how to spell his word, could have simply called any spelling we came up with wrong and thus avoided handing out the prizes, you never knew my father. His views on honesty made the Boy Scout position on that subject seem wishy-washy. There was no doubt among us that my father knew how to spell yiffniff and would award the prizes to anyone who spelled it that way. But nobody seemed able to do it. Finally, we brought in a ringer—my cousin Keith, from Salina, who had reached the finals of the Kansas State Spelling Bee. (Although Keith, who eventually became an English professor, remembers the details of his elimination differently, I'm sure I was saying even then that the word he missed in the finals was "hayseed.") We told my father that Keith, who was visiting Kansas City, wanted to go to a Scout meeting with us to brush up on some of his knots. "Well?" my father said, when the car was loaded. "Yiffniff," my cousin Keith said clearly, announcing the assigned word in the spelling bee style. "Y-y . . . "Y-y! Using y both as a consonant and as a vowel! What a move! We looked at my father for a response. He said nothing. Emboldened, Keith picked up the pace: "Y-y-g-h-k-n-i-p-h." For a few moments the car was silent. Then my father said, "Wrong. Next." Suddenly the car was bedlam as we began arguing about where our plans had gone wrong. "Maybe we should have got the guy who knew how to spell 'hayseed,'" Dogbite said. We argued all the way to the Scout meeting, but it was the sort of argument that erupts on a team that has already lost the game. We knew Keith had been our best shot.

1986 Doing My Talent I can whistle and hum at the same time. It's my talent, in the way the Miss America people use the word talent—as in "Miss Minnesota will now do her talent." If the Miss America people announced that I would now do my talent, I would whistle and hum at the same time. I would probably whistle and hum "Stars and Stripes Forever," although I've also prepared "Buckle Down, Winsocki" in case of an encore. It's a secure feeling, knowing that you're ready if the Miss America people call. I hate to use the phrase "God-given talent"—like a lot of people with God-given talent, I have always prided myself on my lack of pretense—but it's true that whistling and humming at the same time came to me naturally. I didn't work at it, the way I worked at being able to blow a hard-boiled egg out of the shell. It's more like my other talent, the ability to bark like a dog: One day I just realized I could do it. I can whistle/hum anything, but I prefer "Stars and Stripes Forever" because it's a traditional song for people doing my sort of talent. On Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour, a program whose passing I lament, "Stars and Stripes Forever" was a staple. I once saw a man play it on his head with two spoons, varying the notes by how widely he opened his mouth. I suspect he had "Buckle Down, Winsocki" ready as an encore, even though they never did encores on Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour. "Buckle Down, Winsocki" is also traditional. You might think that my ability to whistle and hum at the same time has always been a matter of pride in my family. I know the sort of scenes you're imagining. You see my wife at lunch with one of her friends. "It must be exciting being married to someone who can do a talent," the friend is saying. My wife smiles knowingly. You see my daughters as kindergartners bringing other kids home and begging me to show little Jason and Jennifer and Emma how I can whistle and hum at the same time. "Do 'Stars and Stripes Forever,' Daddy," they say. "Then do 'Buckle Down, Winsocki.'" I do both. Even little Jason looks impressed. "Jesus," he says. "I thought I'd seen everything." That's not the way it has been at all. When my daughters were kindergartners, they never asked me to whistle and hum at the same time for their friends. Little Jason, I know for a fact, still hasn't seen everything, even though he's now sixteen years old. Now that my daughters are teenagers themselves, their response to a bit of spontaneous whistle/humming in a restaurant or an elevator tends to begin with "Daddy, please." I don't know what my wife and her friends say to each other at lunch, but I have to consider the possibility that my wife rolls her eyes up toward the back of her head as her friend asks, "How's the old spoon player these days?" All this reminds me of what used to be said about the kid in my fourth-grade class who couldn't seem to catch on to math: "He doesn't get much encouragement at home." Not that I expect special treatment. I'm not just being modest when I say that I think many people have similar talents, even if they don't always demonstrate them. I've always thought that of world leaders, even though a lot of them act as if they might have had too much encouragement at home. When I used to see pictures of General de Gaulle, I'd always think, "I bet that man can play 'Lady of Spain' on his head with a spoon. He may not want to, but he has the capacity." I believe that if you gave Helmut Kohl an ordinary pocket comb and some waxed paper, he could turn out a credible rendition of "Pop Goes the Weasel." I've always thought that Margaret Thatcher must be able to throw a lighted cigarette in the air and catch it in her mouth. I sometimes think that we would have been better off, and she would have been better off, if she had just gone ahead and done it. Actually, I don't do my own talent in public anymore. Here's what happened: I was in Milwaukee on a book tour. Some people who had read about my talent came in the store and said that they had a man with them who could also whistle and hum at the same time. They suggested that the two of us might like to do a quartet. He was the chairman of the neurology department at the local medical school, although I don't think that had any connection to his talent. The talent I do is not deeply neurological. It's more like a God-given talent. At any rate, it turned out that this man could not simply hum and whistle at the same time. He could hum one tune while he whistled another tune. He could, to be specific, whistle "Goodnight, Irene" while humming

"I'm in the Mood for Love." Well, right then, I packed it in. But I still daydream about doing my talent. Sometimes, I imagine that Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour has been brought back to network television. I'm on the first show. I've whistled and hummed "Stars and Stripes Forever." They call for an encore. I'm ready. 1990 From the Hardcover edition.