

Part-Time Preacher's Kid

Jake Magnusson

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Part-Time Preacher's Kid is a memoir about finding oneself in the world.

Jake Magnusson's *Part-Time Preacher's Kid* is a memoir of self-discovery set against the backdrop of a family's religious conviction and its son's wanderlust.

Magnusson's parents were dedicated to spreading their Christian faith wherever they went, and his father's work as a preacher kept the family moving to a variety of locations—including remote parts of Alaska during the 1950s, when Magnusson was a child. Coherent but detached, Magnusson describes his early years with photographic details and a brief assortment of memories that capture a sense of place and time. From Alaska, the family moved to St. Louis; Magnusson eventually split off to forge his own life, near his parents, as a teacher in Columbia in the 1970s.

The book captures a familiar pattern of growth. When Magnusson is a child, the world feels small to him; as he grows, he seeks broader horizons and questions the religious beliefs that were taught to him; he does this musing work, only to later return to a place much nearer to his roots than he would have imagined. Still, the text struggles as it moves between honoring Magnusson's roots, and covering how he sometimes strove to leave them behind.

The book's more unique recurring themes are Magnusson's love of travel and movement, his sense of joie de vivre, and his considerations of what it means to live with purpose. He reiterates these as he crosses the world and encounters different belief systems. Skepticism and exploration also dominate; both are handled with positivity and hope.

Throughout, those in Magnusson's life—including his family, friends, and acquaintances—are treated with complexity. His relationships are central to his story, which addresses interpersonal connections in the midst of its expressions of his inward work of self-discovery. Indeed, even as Magnusson chooses to make his own way, he avoids disparaging his parents, despite their differing convictions: "Though I resisted their theology and stringent morals," he writes, "I never rejected my parents as human beings."

The book moves at a swift and smooth pace, mimicking Magnusson's transitions between places and movements through time. It maintains a friendly and casual tone, though it also indulges in beautiful scene-setting to capture Magnusson's travels—even finding loveliness in places that he admits he never chose to live.

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MELISSA WUSKE (November 24, 2021)

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