

WILL HOBBS

A Great, Big, Beautiful World

My two older brothers and I ran in a pack. One of my earliest memories is rounding up box turtles from the woods behind our house in Falls Church, Virginia. We kept them only three days. Catch and release, I guess you could call it. When my brothers learned that some kids down the street were keeping two dozen box turtles, we were outraged. We sneaked into their backyard—when they weren't home, naturally. We let all their turtles go. At the age of four, this made quite an impression on me. Don't try this at home!

We were an air force family. Next up was Alaska with its mountains and rivers and bears. By now we had a little sister and brother in tow. Baseball was big. A couple of times we played by the midnight sun. I got hooked on fishing down on the Kenai River, an amazing turquoise gem loaded with trout and salmon. I fell in love with rivers and was in awe of the bear tracks in the mud. During fourth grade, reading grabbed hold of my imagination and took it on one adventure after another. *Call It Courage* was my first favorite book.

We left Alaska on a navy ship in January of '58. A huge winter storm in the Gulf of Alaska turned us every way but loose. We landed green in the gills in northern California. Terra Linda was

a kids' paradise: Little League, paper route, Scouts, and open hillsides to explore. For sixth grade I had the coolest teacher, Mr. Pilch. He knew that I spent a good deal of time looking for gopher snakes, king snakes, and alligator lizards, so he kept a terrarium in the classroom and let me stock it with a snake of the month.

Reptiles came first, but any sort of critter fascinated me, even skunks. When my cousin was visiting, we cornered one against the water tower just to see what would happen. We ran home in a state of high reek. My mother thought we were amusing.

Cardboard sledding was also high on my list. All summer, the wild oats on the hillsides were slick as could be, and they made for thrilling rides on huge flat pieces of cardboard we would cut from refrigerator boxes. Miraculously, no one was maimed.

My baseball career peaked when I struck out the side once on nine pitches. We were huge Giants fans. Our dad took us often to see Number 24 play—the “Say-Hey Kid,” Willie Mays.

California, with our Scout troop, was where I first started backpacking, on treks in the high Sierras. We moved to San Antonio, Texas, for my high school years, but I was lucky enough to work four summers as a guide at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico during late high school and college. During my most memorable summer, I had a horse and burros, and packed in supplies to a remote camp where I led kids into a long-abandoned gold mine. At the end of the summer I would head back to the Sierras with a brother or friend for backpacking along the John Muir Trail, thirteen days once without resupply.

Wilderness had become such a big part of me; I lived from one adventure to the next. I talked my little brother into a ten-day canoe trip on the Bowron Lakes chain in British Columbia. It was rainy, and a two-dollar tube tent didn't serve us well. My meal planning wasn't so great either. We'd live off fish, I told my

brother, and supplement it with granola. Well, we proved that you can live off granola for ten days.

When I got married and moved to Colorado, I became even more dedicated to spending time in the wild places. Jean loved where a backpack could take her, and so did our nieces and nephews. I've done over thirty trips in the high country of the Weminuche wilderness, where my early books *Bearstone* and *Beardance* take place. We became serious river rats. We've been lucky enough to take our own raft through the Grand Canyon ten times so far, and that's why I had to write *Downriver*, to take my readers along.

The North keeps calling me back, to adventures in Canada's Yukon and Northwest Territories, and all over Alaska—sea kayaking, running rivers, working on a salmon troller. I just love being there, and sometimes, afterward, I start thinking of a story. I mined my personal experience heavily for *Far North*, *Wild Man Island*, and *Leaving Protection*.

There's a character in one of my books who says, "Life is best lived as an adventure," and you can see where he got that. It's still a great, big, beautiful world out there. Enjoy it; take care of it!

Biography:

Grew up: Pennsylvania, Panama, Virginia, Alaska, northern and southern California, and Texas

Now lives: Durango, Colorado

Random fact: Built two of his own houses from the ground up

Selected Bibliography:

Jason's Gold

Far North

The Maze