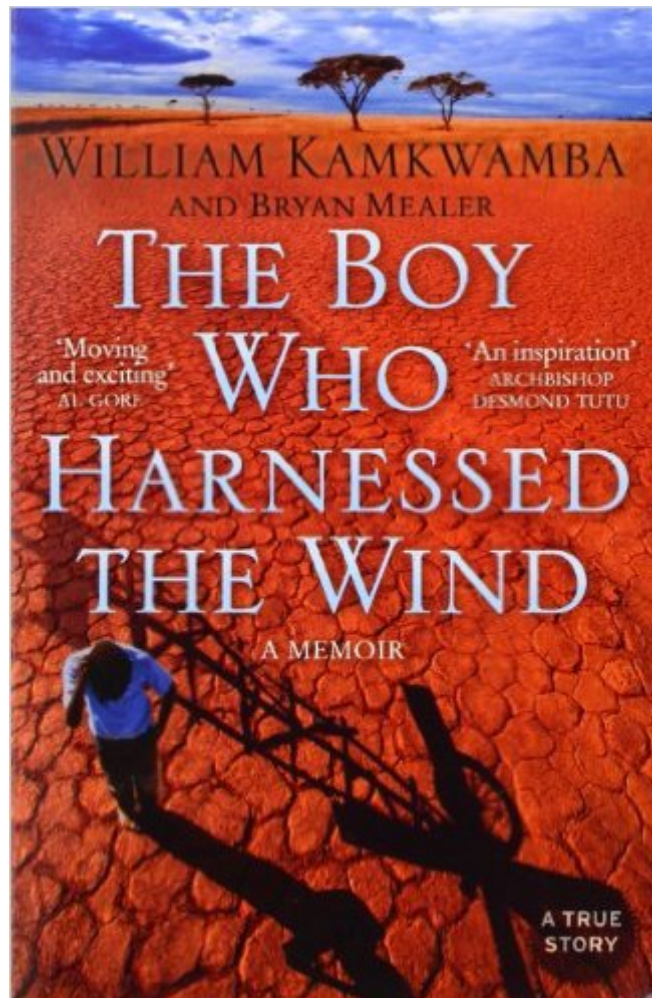


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The Boy Who Harnessed The Wind



Synopsis

When William Kamkwamba was just 14 years old his parents told him that he must leave school and come and work on the family farm as they could no longer afford to \$80 a year tuition fees. This is the story of his refusal to give up on learning and reading. A story of passion, determination and remarkable achievements. Malawi is a country battling AIDS, drought and famine, and in 2002, a season of floods, followed by the most severe famine in fifty years, brought it to its knees. Like the majority of the population, William's family were farmers. They were totally reliant of the maize crop. By the end of 2001, after many lean and difficult years, there was no more crop. They were running out of food - had nothing to sell - and had months until they would be able to harvest their crop again. Forced to leave school at 14 years old, with no hope of raising the funds to go again, William resorted to borrowing books from the small local library to continue his education. One day, browsing the titles, he picked up a book about energy, with a picture of a wind turbine on the front cover. Fascinated by science and electricity, but knowing little more about the technology, William decided to build his own. Ridiculed by those around him, and exhausted from his work in the fields every day, and using nothing more than bits of scrap metal, old bicycle parts and wood from the blue gum tree, he slowly built his very own windmill. This windmill has changed the world in which William and his family live. Only 2 per cent of Malawi has electricity; William's windmill now powers the lightbulbs and radio for his compound. He has since built more windmills for his school and his village. When news of William's invention spread, people from across the globe offered to help him. Soon he was re-enrolled in college and travelling to America to visit wind farms. This is his incredible story. William's dream is that other African's will learn to help themselves - one windmill and one light bulb at a time - and that maybe one day they will be able to power their own computers, and use the internet, and see for themselves how his life has changed after picking up that book in the library.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the story of William Kamkwamba, a clever boy in Malawi, Africa who built his own windmill from found materials at age 14. Much of the energy of the book is that it is a very recent story, the main events taking place just in the last six years. The story is in three parts. The first part tells of William's life growing up and that of his father, giving a fascinating glimpse of the village life of subsistence farmers whose culture has changed little in thousands of years. Daily existence includes very real fears of witchcraft, shamans for healing, and strong currents of superstition. Although written in clear, simple narrative (mostly by the co-author, Bryan Mealer, an AP reporter with extensive experience across Africa), it is by no means a child's bedtime story. Malawi, an interior country of 13 million, has minimal health care, primitive agriculture, and no free public high schools. Villagers can be killed by wild animals in the forest. In 2001 the maize crops failed, plunging the countryside into famine and near social collapse, and William loses friends to disease and starvation. The government comes off badly in this episode, incompetent, brutal against the local village chief who complains, and corrupt. William is a bright boy eager for school, but his family cannot afford the fees. He is forced to drop out. In the second part of the story, doing the best he can in spite of this disappointment, William finds an elementary physics textbook in a local library and sees diagrams of windmills - he cannot even read the English text. From this bit of information, with impressive focus and persistence he manages to build his own version from scraps of wire, an old bicycle hub, and flattened PVC pipe for blades.

After barely surviving a famine in Malawi (sub-Saharan Africa), 14-year-old William Kamkwamba was determined to find a way to make life better for himself and his family. What if he could somehow bring electricity to his village, to pump water for crops in times of drought? Using diagrams in an old forgotten science book called "Using Energy" that he found in a grade school library, he cobbled together a contraption out of scraps and junk that worked to power a few light bulbs -- and changed the life of his village forever. His neighbors, steeped in superstition and with little or no knowledge of science, thought him crazy. But he had a gift for mechanical things, he

understood the principles, and he knew he could do it. And he did. Eventually he got a second windmill going, powering a water pump from a deep well, which is now used by all the women in the village. Today every house there has a solar panel and a battery to store electricity, too. But this is much more than a story about an African boy who built a working windmill. It's a monument to the human spirit. In fact, we don't even get to making the windmill itself until halfway through the book. In the first half, William tells us a lot about his life in Africa, the terrible famine that swept his land, how he and his family survived, and the clues along the way which eventually led to him making the windmill. Even as a little kid, he was taking apart radios to see how they worked -- with no books or training, just trial and error. Then he saw a bicycle light that ran from a mechanical dynamo -- the kind that generates electricity when you pedal. Experimenting with this, he figured out how to get it to power his radio when he turned the bike pedals.

I didn't really know what to expect when I purchased this book for my Kindle, although I will admit that I noticed the high marks (5 stars) from the other reviewers. So I decided to give it a try and see what the hype was about. For the first 10% of the book (Kindle doesn't have page numbers) I really was regretting the purchase. The pages were filled with stories of William (main character) as a young boy and the various predicaments he found himself in. The stories told of magic and witchcraft that caused all kinds of terrible things to happen and the overall direction of the book seemed to bounce back and forth from story or idea to another story or idea. I found myself thinking that these stories were so farfetched, how is the remainder of the book going to integrate these magical tales. At that point, I wasn't looking forward to reading more of the book. Nevertheless I persevered and was happily rewarded. As William grows older (relatively speaking), the story - rather than witchcraft and magic - turns to real life events (famine and hardship) which actually brings you closer to William and his family. Not that many of us can relate to devastating famine where it wipes out entire populations, but it does help us understand what William had to deal with during such a trying time. Some touching moments are created in these pages and definitely rewards for turning the pages. Once William begins his journey of harnessing the wind, for me, this was the most interesting part of the book. It truly was fascinating to me to not only learn how some of the things we take for granted (like electricity) can play such an integral role in communities that are essentially third world countries but also how one would go about constructing things with no money.

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