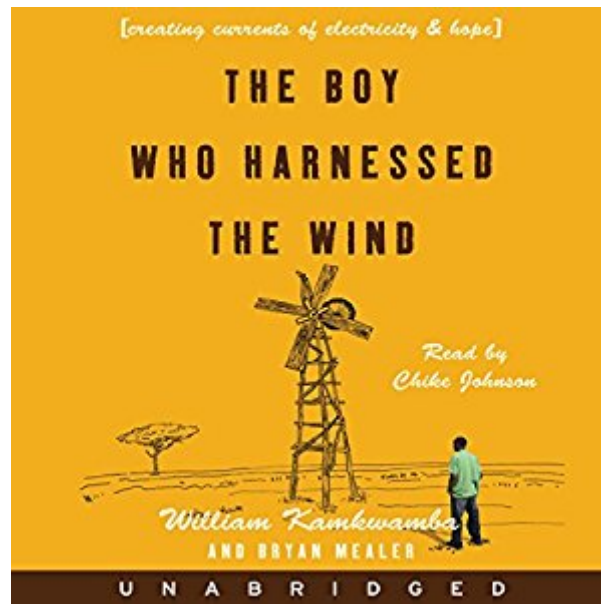


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The Boy Who Harnessed The Wind: Creating Currents Of Electricity And Hope



Synopsis

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind is the immensely engaging and inspiring true account of an enterprising African teenager who constructed a windmill from scraps to create electricity for his entire community. William Kamkwamba shares the remarkable story of his youth in Malawi, Africa—a nation crippled by intense poverty, famine, and the AIDS plague—and how, with tenacity and imagination, he built a better life for himself, his family, and his village. The poignant and uplifting story of Kamkwamba's inspiration and personal triumph, co-written with Bryan Mealer, The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind has already won ringing praise from former Vice President and Nobel Laureate Al Gore as well as Paolo Coelho, internationally bestselling author of The Alchemist.

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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