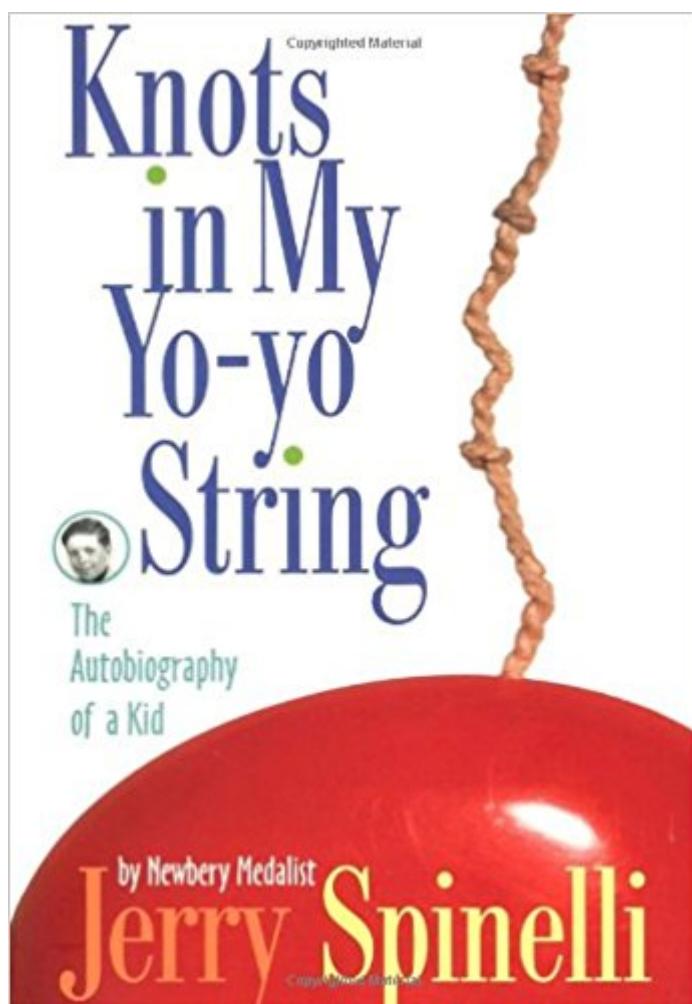


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# Knots In My Yo-Yo String



## Synopsis

Newbery medalist Jerry Spinelli has penned his early autobiography with all the warmth, humor, and drama of his best-selling fiction. "A master of those embarrassing, gloppy, painful, and suddenly wonderful things that happen on the razor's edge between childhood and full-fledged adolescence" (The Washington Post). From first memories through high school, including first kiss, first punch, first trip to the principal's office, and first humiliating sports experience, this is not merely an account of a highly unusual childhood. Rather, like Spinelli's fiction, its appeal lies in the accessibility and universality of his life. Entertaining and fast-paced, this is a highly readable memoir-- a must-have for Spinelli fans of all ages.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

In this montage of sharply focused memories punctuated with b&w photographs, Spinelli (*Maniac Magee*; *Wringer*) reconstructs the experience of growing up during the '50s. His descriptions of his childhood universe (which does not extend beyond Norristown, Pa.) elicits the use of all five senses. He invites readers to gaze upon the same stars he studied as a child; to listen for the "not-very-loud" whistle of Mrs. Seeton calling not only her own brood but all the kids home to their suppers ("for a mother's call somehow touches us all"); to smell the "sour, vaguely rotten" aroma of the Adam Scheidt Brewing Company; to savor the taste of Texas Hot Wieners ("They had spunk. They fought

back"); and to feel the "clack" of colliding teeth during his first kiss with Kathy Heller (in a game of Truth or Consequences). The audience might be content to bask in the warm glow of post-WWII reflections, but the author has other plans: he shows readers how the seeds of a writer were planted in his youth. Wedged between sometimes painful, more often hilarious scenes of preadolescent and adolescent angst are quiet, contemplative moments when young Spinelli develops his artistic imagination replaying the days' events and pondering such mysteries as time, space and the origin of knots in his yo-yo string. As Spinelli effortlessly spins the story of an ordinary Pennsylvania boy, he also documents the evolution of an exceptional author. Ages 10-13. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Grade 5 UpAA loving reminiscence of childhood. Although the first five pages are slow moving, detail laden, and rather puzzling in parts, the rest of the book takes off as Spinelli takes small, seemingly insignificant snippets of the 10 years he lived on George Street on the West End of Norristown, PA, and explains from his adult viewpoint how they were stepping-stones to his success as a popular children's book author. Even though he only read cereal boxes and comic books as a child, he displays and describes his "early leaning toward language." Phrases such as "music's bunkhouse" to define an old crank phonograph, and using "picturing" to "co-create the moment" to show how listening to the radio was interactive, are evidence of his talent with words. In a conversational tone, Spinelli fondly recalls neighbors, pastimes, and events of the 1940s and 50s. Black-and-white photos present amusing images from his past. Readers may not be familiar with all of the lingo (Bonomo's Turkish taffy) or personalities (Lash La Rue), but they will enjoy the humorous episodes. In the last chapter, the author states, "I mixed my memories with imagination to make stories, to make fiction, and when I finished writing, I had a book, my fifth novel....It became my first published book....I continued to write stories about kids and to rummage through the attic of my memories." Lucky for his readers!AKate Kohlbeck, Randall School, Waukesha, WI  
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(Review by the 'Mrs'): I grew up in the same neighborhood as Jerry Spinelli - I knew the same people mentioned in his book. Jerry was older than me. I loved reading about all MY childhood playing places! Jerry's writing really captures the folks and areas. He keeps one's interest. I'm looking forward to reading his other books.

I liked that it was a good book and a autobiography at the same time. I recommend this book to

anyone who is looking for a good read and wants to learn some new facts about Jerry Spinelli. I love this book and it was a really gr8 option 4 my English project about reading an autobiography or a biography for this month.

just a book about growing up. My son needed this book for an 8th grade project. He wasn't very interested in reading it, however I found the book very interesting. Brings back many memories of growing up. I am certain that at some point in his life(my son's) he will relate to a lot of what this book says. It is well written and fun to read.

It gave many interesting views and was organized in a unique and enjoyable way. I loved the comparisons made to his life being a Yo-yo string. It made me think and jogged my mind. It was very enjoyable to read about the little story's of this author's life and how he finally decided to become an author. Five stars for me!

Gave as gift - she loved it.

"In those days I was many whats. A kid can be that. Grownups have gone ahead and answered the question: 'What shall I be?' They have tossed out all the whats that don't fit and have become just one ... But a kid is still becoming. And I, as a kid alone, was free to be just about anything ... : salamander finder, crawfish annoyer, flat-stone creek skipper, cedar chest smeller, railroad car counter, tin can stomper, milkweed blower, mulberry picker, snowball smoother, paper bag popper, steel rail walker, box turtle toucher, dark-sky watcher, best-part saver. They didn't last long, these careers of mine ... But while they employed me, I gave them an honest minute's work and was paid in the satisfactions of curiosity met and a job well done." - Jerry Spinelli in *KNOTS IN MY YO-YO STRING*  
When compared to the several coming-of-age memoirs that I've read - *Â Blooming: A Small-Town GirlhoodÂ* by Susan Allen Toth, *Â Sleeping ArrangementsÂ* by Laura Shaine Cunningham, *Â When All the World Was Young: A MemoirÂ* by Barbara Holland, *Â WAIT TILL NEXT YEAR: A MEMOIRÂ* by Doris Kearns Goodwin, and *Â The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A MemoirÂ* by Bill Bryson come immediately to mind because of their excellence - *KNOTS IN MY YO-YO STRING* is, at 148 pages, relatively brief. But, it's packed with good stuff for anyone fondly remembering growing up in the 40s and 50s of the last century. When did we get old? Spinelli was born in Norristown, PA in 1941, and grew up there. His story spans the period from about 1945 to 1957. His memories encompass pretty much what any other American of a middle class upbringing

will remember from that time. Perhaps only the place - urban vs. rural, one region vs. another - will lead to variations, but the specifics are, not surprisingly, universal: the grandparents' home, elementary school, spelling bees, sports, first crush, first kiss, best friends, pets, running amok to explore and play in one's extended neighborhood, trains passing by on the local track, siblings, the neighborhood stores, etc. One chapter refers to the notes he received (and saved over the decades) from his first real crush, Judy Pierson. Now, I don't think most guys would admit to that; I'm impressed. *KNOTS IN MY YO-YO STRING* is sprinkled with family snaps of the period. One is of his parents happily posing at the beach 6 months before his birth. How many of us ever stop to consider that our own parents were once young, in love, and with the whole world at their feet? Some of Jerry's recollections are positively poignant, as when he recalls how, when he began to write this autobiography, he asked his younger brother, Bill, to contribute any memories he had of their childhood relationship. "Several weeks later he handed me a list of memorable events. I read it over. I was stunned: I hardly recalled any of them ... He especially remembers one day when I propped him on the bar of my Roadmaster and gave him a lift ... He remembers feeling proud and special. Most of all he remembers feeling safe, his brother's breath in his ear, his brother's arms joining the handlebars in a protective embrace ... I have decided that I like Bill's memories of us better than my own ... Maybe if I keep picturing this memory of Bill's and feeling it for a long-enough time, it will begin to fool me into thinking it is my own." We can never go home again, but writing such as Spinelli's can perhaps take us part of the way.

My 10 year old gives it two stars. It was required summer reading for school.

My son, the teacher, has his class vote each year on a book that the whole class will read. Any Jerry Spinelli book has a good chance of winning. This autobiography is special written by a special author, who knows kids and what they face in life.

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