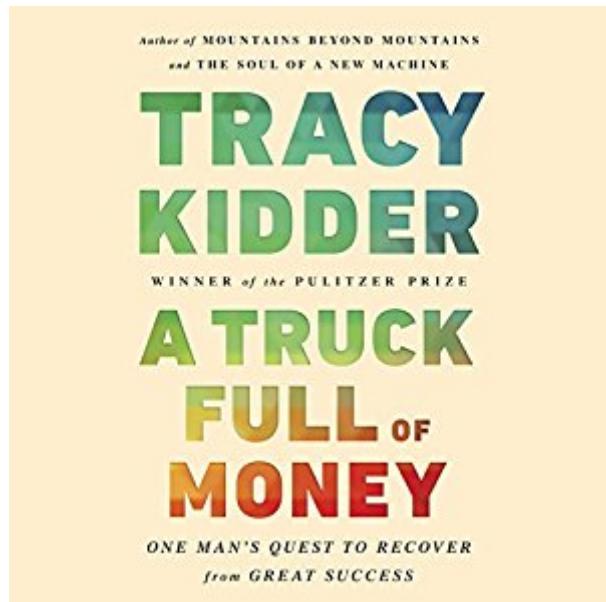


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A Truck Full Of Money



Synopsis

Tracy Kidder, the "master of the nonfiction narrative" (The Baltimore Sun) and author of the best-selling classic *The Soul of a New Machine*, now tells the story of Paul English, a kinetic and unconventional inventor and entrepreneur who as a boy rebelled against authority. Growing up in working-class Boston, English discovered a medium for his talents the first time he saw a computer. As a young man, despite suffering from what would eventually be diagnosed as bipolar disorder, he began his pilgrim's journey through the ups and downs in the brave new world of computers. Relating to the Internet as if it were an extension of his own mind, he discovered that he had a talent for conceiving innovative enterprises and building teams that can develop them, becoming "a Pied Piper" of geeks. His innovative management style, success, and innate sense of fair play inspire intense loyalty. Early on one colleague observed, "Someday this boy's going to get hit by a truck full of money, and I'm going to be standing beside him". Yet when English did indeed make a fortune - when the travel website Kayak was sold for almost \$2 billion - the first thing he thought about was how to give the money away: "What else would you do with it?" The second thing he thought was, "What's next?" With the power of a consummate storyteller, Tracy Kidder casts a fresh, critical, and often humorous eye on the way new ideas and new money are reshaping our culture and the world. *A Truck Full of Money* is a mesmerizing portrait of an irresistibly endearing man who is indefatigable, original, and as unpredictable as America itself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I honestly don't know if I am more impressed by Tracy Kidder or Paul English, I enjoyed reading this book so much I tried to find my copy of Soul of a New Machine. I wanted to hand it to my son, but may have already given it to his sister... in any event, I am going to need a new copy. I do not think that when I read it as a teen I was aware of what an incredible writer Tracy Kidder was. Paul English is fairly incredible too, not just for his intelligence, foresight (and a dash of luck) but his sensitivity, passion and compassion. As a psychologist I would also add self-control. Few are able to channel mania in such a productive way. Ah, if we could bottle that. All that said, I enjoyed the book and think, if anything, the editorial blurb undersold it. I do not think I have ever said that before. This is the best written biography I have ever read, and I have read quite a few. There had to be an amazing synergy between the two of them, because Tracy Kidder captured not only his history, but inner thoughts, fragments of his life. in an almost palpable way. For his part.. I think that Paul English also has gifts which he has not recognized. His insights into the people around him are amazing and undoubtedly contributed quite a lot to his success as a manager, recruiter and team builder. On one level this book could be read as a management or entrepreneurship tutorial. Paul English is the model serial entrepreneur. I am glad to see him teaching. and someplace where he could have real impact... but on another level, I really do think a lot of his management ability stems from his personality and insight into human nature. If he can pass that on, he is a real wizard.

In "A Truck Full of Money," Tracy Kidder wonders if there is such a thing as "talent suppressed by time." He quotes another author as positing that perhaps the builders of the Pyramids would be the same ones today who excel at computer programming. If this is the case, it's lucky that the subject of this book, Paul English, was born when he was. One of seven children, English grew up in a working class Irish-Catholic family outside Boston in the seventies'. His father had a side business of buying, renovating and selling household appliances, from which English would pick up a few skills that would serve him well later. Attending Boston Latin as a teenager, he discovered its computer club and later figured out a way to hack into the mainframe and steal the attendance passwords. Later his parents would bring home a computer for him and his siblings to experiment with. He graduated from the University of Mass-Boston, which he only attended in the first place because they had a jazz band (another one of his many interests.) Kidder does a fine job of portraying the dynamics in English's office and profiling such colleagues as Bill O'Donnell, Paul Schwenk and Brenda White, who he would later marry. He spends much time describing and discussing English's various projects, vanity and serious, which include "Road Wars," an app that lets drivers play a traffic safety game and accumulate points as they commute; an interactive

website about the game of Chinese chess- "Get Human," a website that provides consumers with phone numbers of the companies they wish to contact'; as well as Kayak - a travel website, founded in 2004, that provides referrals and recommendations and was sold in a billion dollar deal in 2012.

Tracy Kidder is a respected writer in the creative nonfiction genre, so I was anxious to get a copy of this book before its September release. Additionally, I've always been interested in the rise of computers in this country and those who helped spearhead the movement, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Bios on Steve Jobs, as well as accounts of the upward mobility of Bill Gates and Bill Joy, written by Malcolm Gladwell in "Outliers," were fascinating reads to me. So I was jazzed to read Kidder's account of computer-coding genius Paul English, who may best be known as the co-founder of Kayak.com, a search engine for travelers. My take: Much of "A Truck Full of Money" is mesmerizing if you enjoy reading about the rising computer field and ambitious software engineers on their way up. Unfortunately, I found the last one-third of the book to be unfocused and dull. What started as a five-star book came down to a three. What's perplexing is that "A Truck Full" is marketed as a book about a rich individual, English, who selflessly gives all his cash away to help the less fortunate. I kept waiting for this superhero deed to happen and waiting and waiting some more. When English finally does decide to act from the heart, helping the homeless in Boston and the poor in Haiti, it's all very glossed over and anticlimactic. Readers jump from English frantically wheeling and dealing to start some fad dotcom company called Blade to suddenly trying to save the world. In the final analysis, neither achievement feels like much. Likewise, the flow of Kidder's book is broken when he delves into all the internet domains, projects, apps, tools, and programs that English tried but failed to get off the ground. My eyes glazed over this content, and I didn't get much out of it.

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