


## **Where's My Wand?: One Boy's Magical Triumph over Alienation and Shag Carpeting**

*Eric Poole*

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**Where's My Wand?: One Boy's Magical Triumph over Alienation and Shag Carpeting** Eric Poole Augusten Burroughs, David Sedaris, and David Rakoff have all produced winning memoirs of their demented, alternately heartrending and sidesplitting late- twentieth-century American childhoods. Now, first-time author Eric Poole joins their ranks with his chronicle of a childhood gone hilariously and heartbreakingly awry in the Midwest of the 1970s. From the age of eight through early adolescence, Poole sought refuge from his obsessive-compulsive mother, sadistic teachers, and sneering schoolyard thugs in the Scotchgarded basement of his family's suburban St. Louis tract house. There, emulating his favorite TV character, Endora from *Bewitched*, he wrapped himself in a makeshift caftan and cast magical spells in an effort to maintain control over the rapidly shifting ground beneath his feet. But when a series of tragic events tested Eric's longstanding belief that magic can vanquish evil, he began to question the efficacy of his incantations, embarking on a spiritual journey that led him to discover the magic that comes only from within.

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## Where's My Wand?: One Boy's Magical Triumph over Alienation and Shag Carpeting Details

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# **From Reader Review Where's My Wand?: One Boy's Magical Triumph over Alienation and Shag Carpeting for online ebook**

## **Anita says**

First things first, I was alerted to this book's existence on facebook, by a former high school classmate. Sally posted about this book, written by yet another high school classmate of ours(yay for the Class of 78). Honestly I knew Eric's name, and I remembered him as tall, thin and in the band, and I didn't know much else. It's likely I was just as forgettable 32 years later, I was short, average, not part of any particular group and just one of over 700 in our graduating class.

What I did discover about Eric in this memoir is so much better than that faint image of a young man. Eric Poole was a quiet reserved boy, picked on, bullied and yet amid all that he found a place and I rich fantasy life almost that helped him to manage those bullies and a mom with OCD before it was likely named. Eric's fascination with the TV show Bewitched and the outlandish mother in law, Endora, lead him to spend endless hours in his basement, conjuring up images of how his life should be, and hoping and praying that his "magic" would help him out. Eric's relationship with his mother was typical of those we had growing up, mom's were not our friends to hang out with, they were to be feared at times, and obeyed. His mom's obsession with raking the carpeting and ironing the linens went beyond just good housekeeping. Eric discovered much more about himself over those many years growing up. His memoir is written mostly about his pre-adolescent life, but takes us, the reader, up to his high school days, when things seem to come full circle for young Eric.

I laughed and cried and reminisced about a place and time we've grown so far away from. Our suburban St. Louis up bringing was very similar, though I missed most of the bullying, and sadly probably was one of those mean girls from time to time(hanging much older head in shame). The book took me back to my youth of no cell phones or video games, or i-pods, just 4 channels on the TV, and most of our homes only had one or two of those. We had FM radio and we didn't know better and we liked it.

Eric is a writer with such a wonderful sense of humor and honesty it makes me want to share this book with everyone. I know the people in Barnes & Noble and Chick-fil-a heard me laughing and sighing the last couple of days.

I've rated this book a 5 out of 5, I loved it, it's amazing. Most of all, it makes me wish I had known Eric better in our days at Hazelwood Central High School.....I missed out on so much.

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## **Nicholas Husbye says**

Eric Poole's Where is My Wand is one of the latest entries into the world of memoirs written by successful gay men detailing their awkward and unpopular childhood. Poole's narratives were cohesive - a fact I appreciated after reading Wade Rouse's disjointed America's Boy a few weeks ago - anchored by his love for all things pop culture. The title is a bit misleading in this regard; Poole's magical triumph has little to do with a wand and more with a chenille bed spread, which he uses to emulate Endora from Bewitched. This device seems a little heavy-handed at times, morphing from the quirky activities of a pop culture-obsessed gay boy growing up in the midwest to some deep questioning of religion and spirituality with little or no transition other than a mention that Poole is getting older.

That said, I did enjoy the book. Poole is a talented writer who can write about his controlling mother, complacent father, and self-involved sister without sacrificing the sense of affection he had for these people. His writing, at best, is tight and clever; at its worst, it is heavily metaphorical. Sometimes the magic just

doesn't work. But his exploits are entertaining, his insights into his life touching, and I find myself wondering about what happened to Poole in the distance between St. Louis and Los Angeles.

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### **Laura says**

This was a book I won from a Goodreads giveaway. I was very excited by the premise and had high hopes when I started the novel, but I felt a little let down. I don't like Augusten Borroughs' work very much, although I do really love certain books by David Sedaris, and I had heard this novel as a sort of in-between. I didn't find it that way. While certain parts made me smile, none of them made me actually laugh. The first issue I had with the book was Eric's mother. I think it's possible that she really was/is as angry and loud as the character in the book was, but she seemed like such a bitch that I had a hard time believing that her husband would be able to stand staying in the same room as her, let alone married to her. I felt that a lot of the situations or dialogue or characters had truth to them, but that they were tweaked to be a better story. If it didn't feel so obvious, I wouldn't mind it, but I couldn't lose myself in the book and just enjoy it. Every situation or conversation that felt a little forced or unreal made me sigh and feel like putting the book down. As it is, I only got to the fifth chapter. I think Mr. Poole has the potential to be a good author, but that this book is a little too self-indulgent. I think my mom might enjoy all the references to the 70's, so I'm going to give it to her.

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### **Renee says**

This is Eric Poole's episodic memoir of growing up in the 1970s in the city of St. Louis. If I were rating this book solely on content I probably would have given in three stars; however, the writing is razor sharp, and laugh-out-loud hysterical at times. This book focuses on his long-suffering father, his older sister, and his cleanliness-obsessed mother, who if Obsessive Cleanliness disorders would have been the rave in the 1970's; she would have worn the crown.

The fact that Poole's idol was Agnes Moorehead who played Endora on Bewitched is simply beautiful.

Where's My Wand is one of the funniest books I've read in a long time, and should I find this book is available in audio in my library, I would certainly re-read it!

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### **Teri Stich says**

This little gem has been on and off my radar for quite some time. As I was working in the Biography section of the library, it once again found it's way into my hands. Okay time to read it. Entertaining, rather heartbreaking tale of a boy whose differences caused him much ridicule by the school bullies and whose family life was less than desirable. He found solace in innocent magic based on Endora from the TV show Bewitched. Touching, though I will admit the middle sections all but turned me off to it. The views of the church and their methods of instruction, well, left a lot to be desired as far as I am concerned. I had to keep in mind the author grew up in the 70's, and that got me through. Eric Poole is a witty, quite humorous writer. Recommended to any for which school was not their favorite part of life and feel as I do, the best part was being done with it! Growing up is hard enough but when your life is not "the Norm" it is harder still, to be

able to look back upon it with the humor of Poole is a Magic in itself.

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### **Jill Furedy says**

The title of this book caught my eye when it first came out, so I finally picked it up. There was a lot of stuff that made me laugh out loud (I found his author's note appropriate, where he said he was David Sedaris & Fran Lebowitz's love child...at least from Sedaris, don't know Lebowitz). However there was less magic than I expected. I thought he was going to be more obsessed with it and it would pervade every couple of pages at least. As it was, he only disappeared into the basement once every chapter or so to drape himself in a bedspread and gesticulate in imitation of Endora from Bewitched.

So this was more a biography of a nonpopular young boy with an irregular family, who occasionally tried to conjure more positive outcomes. Then at some point magic transitions from innocent reenactments of a TV show into a conflict with his religion, is rejected for a while and slowly makes it's compromised way back into his teenage life. That part wasn't as much fun. And the book ends in his teenage years, and we are left to assume he has moved on from his magical thinking. I wouldn't have minded a glimpse into his adult life and whether magic ever reappeared (come on, they made Bewitched into a movie, he had to have a reaction to that..and did he not read Harry Potter and recall his youthful incantations?) So points for making me laugh and it being a fun read, but more magic and more reflection would have helped it live up to it's title better.

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### **Michelle says**

This book was awesome! Eric Poole used Bewitched style magic to help him make the world he was growing up in a little more to his liking. The understanding and amusement, with which adult Eric looked back on child Eric, gave this memoir its humor, sentimentality, and appeal. You will root for young Eric whether he is trying to make friends, save small animals, or gain some time with his sister, like they used to share. I highly recommend this book, and am thrilled to see that that Poole has another one due out in the spring.

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### **Lori says**

My emotions about the 1970s are mixed, to say the least. Take a look at my review of James Lilek's "Interior Desecrations" and you will see that, along with Lileks, I have come not to praise the Keep on Truckin' era...but to bury it. Lately, now that this bilious tinged decade is almost 40 years behind us, I have softened just a bit. And I begin to realize that there are those little details I almost miss.

Eric Poole was a huge loser in the 70s as well as being a Bewitched groupie. Already he and I share important bonds. We might have happily shared a box of Ding Dongs in front of the Magnavox together. I'm glad he took some time to write about a Midwestern suburban childhood in the days of disco and troll dolls. Poole's memoir hit the right note for me between humour and darkness. Poole obviously used humour to surmount the challenges of a neurotic and verbally abusive mother, an outcast status among peers and a homosexual orientation in a venue that was not accepting.

I winced in empathy as I read the following description of junior high:

..."seventh grade had not been a good year. I hated junior high, a brick penal colony that housed all the most heinous people from elementary school plus several hundred new students vying for the title. My one class in grade school had now mutated into six classes per day, which multiplied the number of students who could despise me on a daily basis."

But then I laughed. There were quite a few howlers in this little book.

The shag carpet, the Bobby Sherman poster, the begging-for-litigation "Giant Slide" attraction, the variety show, the school band attempting to play Boogie Fever and one lonely boy's fixation with Endora...it is all here for the remembering. The pages are also populated with beaten down teachers in sansabelt slacks, paddle happy principals and third rate adolescent goons. I lived the Cleveland version of these St. Louis blues. Hard to believe I miss it. Every once in awhile I hear Andy Gibb on the oldies station and I do.

I recommend this to readers who were seventies kids and who have had the requisite therapy to revisit the period safely. Fans of David Sedaris may also appreciate Eric Poole's characterization of unhealthy family life and cheez whiz culture.

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### **Jen Marchain says**

This book was recommended by a co-worker for our book club read. I am only two chapters in and I am in love with it!

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### **Aviva says**

It was a humorous take on what must have been a challenging childhood, although the author was lucky that even though his parents were religious enough to go to three services a week in a Southern Baptist church and were totally dysfunctional in so many ways, they loved him. And they told both him and others that they loved him, even though it was clear pretty early in his life that he was gay, or at least really feminine for a boy. :-)

But there were things that irritated me enough to knock my rating down to two stars, a whole star (and maybe two) lower than I would have otherwise.

First of all, the author was born in '61. When he was a seventh-grader, i.e. 12 to 13 years old, he gets a BB gun to teach a neighbor kid who's torturing small animals. His dad wants to set up a target in the back yard, but Poole doesn't want the neighbor kid to know about his gun, so, he whines to his dad, "It's hot. And I could catch Lyme disease from a mosquito or get stung by a bee and discover I'm allergic and swallow my tongue and choke to death!" So it's what? 1974 when the scene allegedly occurs? According to Wikipedia, Lyme wasn't identified until a bunch of cases in Lyme, Connecticut, were identified in 1975. In 1978, it was identified as a tick-borne disease. But y'know, I grew up in the '70s in the Midwest, and even if he's off by a

year or two in his life of when it happened, Lyme disease was not widely publicized in the Midwest that a junior high school student would have known enough about it for it to play a big role in a major scene of his life. It's not like he mentions reading lots of newspapers.

The bigger thing I hated? He claims, either seriously or with humor so subtle that I didn't notice it, that God talked to him. Like out loud. Yeah, that's pretty much a deal breaker for me. I'd have much better appreciation if he continued to believe he had magic powers like he did during his Endora phase as a young kid.

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## **Traci says**

"Perhaps it was my parents' relationship - which seemed to be devolving into nightly performances of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* sans the Edward Albee script and intermissions - that sparked my interest in magic. Perhaps it was because my new third-grade teacher, a sadist in stilettos named Mrs. Locke, had it in for me. Today, Mrs. Locke would be able to positively channel her aggression into a career as a bounty hunter or an Attica prison guard, but in 1969, her only outlet was a group of unsuspecting third-graders, and one in particular. Whatever the cause, I worshipped the TV show *Bewitched*. The notion of being able to snap my fingers, wave my hands, or twinkle my nose and magically alter the circumstances of life was intoxicating, akin to learning voodoo or having Jesus owe you one."

From an early age, Eric Poole was obsessed with Endora of TV's *Bewitched*. Just days after his family's Pontiac pulled into the driveway of the Pooles' new home in St. Louis, Missouri, eight-year-old Eric had staked out the basement as his special place: a spot where he could secretly perform magical incantations, draped in a flowing white bedspread he furtively hoped his compulsive mother wouldn't miss. At every rocky moment in his life, or when he was desperate to change future events before they could unfold, Eric would turn to his magical tools, close his eyes tight, and try to make everything all right. From his friendship with a fearless girl who has no arms, to his attempt to perform an exorcism on the cute boy in his Vacation Bible School, to his anxiety that his magical wish to be superior has caused the death of a family friend, Eric Poole's stories take you into the mind of someone trying to make sense of the world and his place in it. *Where's My Wand?* follows Eric from childhood through adolescence - a journey in which the magic in his life slowly morphs from childhood wonder to religious dogma to, finally, the grown-up understanding that the real, true magic is believing in yourself.

Can I just tell how much I loved this book? I don't know if it was reading about the 60s and 70s that made me nostalgic for my childhood (highly doubtful), or the family dynamics (more likely), or the wonderfully touching story of a young child searching for friends and being snubbed at almost every turn (BINGO!) but something really resonated with me while reading this hopefully introductory work from Poole.

The above blurbs from the dust jacket should pretty much give you all the information you need. I will say that I thought the book was going to be a lot more about Poole growing up in this time period as a young gay man, how that would make him feel isolated, how hard it would be to come to terms with those feelings, etc. But the sexuality issue is barely touched upon, except for one very hilarious scene where Eric tries to "exorcise" a "demon" from his friend that he's made through church. Even then, I got the impression that his intentions were still honorable; he thought his friend was possessed because he found himself attracted to this new friend, and that couldn't be because there was anything wrong with him, Eric.

The other thing that I thought was interesting was his relationship with his mother; it pretty much blows all

the old stereotypes right out of the water. His mother does not dote on him, nor are they particularly close. (She does stand up for him in one completely brilliant scene, which made me like her a bit more). On the other hand, he and his father do seem quite close, and take an annual trip every year to have the family car worked on by an old friend of Eric's dad. They get to ride the bus (not Greyhound, as it's a bit too pricey), stay in a nice motel (12 stories!) and spend some time together without having to worry about raking the shag carpet back into pristine condition (yep, that would be Eric's mother's OCD rearing it's ugly head).

There are some strong family dynamics here, and I learned a lot more about the Baptist faith than I knew before. I would highly recommend this to anyone who wants a touching story about growing up as a nerd/loner, as well as anyone who wants a good laugh. I sincerely hope that Poole has another book in the works, as I would love to read about his life again.

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### **Emily S. says**

I definitely enjoyed the humor Mr. Poole used while detailing his humiliating moments of childhood/adolescence. Reading this book had me reflecting on my own funny/embarrassing/poignant moments while growing up (which I always enjoy doing-- "The Wonder Years" was my favorite tv series for many years!) I was a little confused as to what the point of the book was, where it was going, and if it was going to all come together. The last chapter finally did it for me. Not only was it my favorite chapter, but it finally laid out the life lesson that was learned. Easy fun enjoyable read.

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### **Carol says**

I really enjoyed this book from the problems with shag carpeting to the young boy who felt like an outsider and dearly wanted friends, to slowly becoming young man who made his mark in school with his trumpet. I will probably give it to one of my friends but I hate to give it up.

In *Where's My Wand*, Eric Poole shows why he adopted magic as a way of defense from his family situation. When his father got laid off from work, his mother grew more overbearing and more obsessive compulsive to cleanliness. At the same time, his father seemed to shrink into the walls. Eric had to in order to survive adopt his own brand of magical thinking. Bewitched's Endora became his role model.

Gradually through some heartbreaking experiences, he found himself in more ways than one. He keeps his sense of humor throughout the book and kindled memories of my own growing up. Some parts of the book had me roaring with laughter and others turned me to tears. I loved this book.

This should be 4 ½ stars instead of 4.

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### **Lauren says**

Reviewed in conjunction with *I Want to Be Left Behind: Finding Rapture Here on Earth*

I read these memoirs back to back inside of a week and, despite their differences, it's difficult to review them separately. At their core, both are memoirs about growing up as the outlier in a Southern Baptist family and finding personal faith within that environment. The authors differ in their approach – Mr. Poole glides through his tome with humor while religion is front, center, and sideways in Ms. Peterson's world.



I began *I Want to Be Left Behind* with the wrong expectations: I expected a funny, touching account of Ms. Peterson's journey while the book is much more of a flat arc detailing her status as the odd duck of her family. If you're looking for a story of a journey from religious to spiritual, go elsewhere.

For that matter, I expected some scandal after seeing Ms. Peterson's youngest sister's incessant "reviews" on any and every site before reading the book (which is interesting, given some of the information I found that indicated the sister likely has her own agenda in taking a family feud public). There's no scandal or, for that matter, any real tension in the book: there's a lot of telling but no showing. The characters are neither demons nor saints – rather, they're flat. Ms. Peterson's unresolved issues and passive aggressive tone overwhelm the book. If anyone comes across poorly here, it's her. If I didn't know better, I would have thought she was closer to twenty than sixty: at some point, adults need to make peace with their childhood and move on – especially if one is going to write a book about finding rapture on earth.

But it's the lack of arc that I find difficult to forgive. This memoir suggests (although Ms. Peterson denies this) that she exchanged one type of extreme and narrow viewpoint for another. This book is what I classify as the worst sort of memoir: self-centered ramblings from someone with an unjustified superiority complex.

After *I Want to Be Left Behind*, I apprehensively began *Where's My Wand?* as I couldn't handle additional literary narcissism. In June, I had attended an author event for the book, and it ranks as one of the worst author talks I've ever attended. While Mr. Poole was generally amusing (although his comment indicating the book was simply a way to get a foot in the door for a television show bugged – books are more than a stepping stone to Hollywood! They are their own art form!), the crowd was mostly his friends and associates (despite being a public event, I felt like I was intruding on a private party) and were the worst of shallow Los Angeles. I did stay for the event, and despite finding the excerpt entertaining, I left without a copy of the book, unsure if I would even read the book. However, the excerpt had been quite good, and I overcame my annoyance and checked the book out of the library.

I say all of this to explain that despite a desire to hate this book, I found it everything charming. It's a sweet book that's funny and touching and lightly veers between both with no effort. It has much more of an arc that one would expect from a book compared to David Sedaris' work. Each chapter is a vignette while also part of a story about growing up and learning about the elusive and changing nature of imagination, faith, and identity. Mr. Poole successfully walks a fine line and deftly captures his family's foibles while still loving them. As a child of the Midwest myself, I loved how Mr. Poole embraced the humor in a Midwestern upbringing without mocking it. This book could have very easily been either a rant about unresolved childhood issues or an uncomfortable satire full of unlovable characters. Instead it navigates the line between the two, and the result is both genuine and funny (and if that's because Mr. Poole is simply a master advertiser, frankly, I like my ignorance and belief that it is real).

I'm sure some people will disagree and say these books have nothing in common, that the authors had different goals in writing them. That may be true, but I still found them interesting contrasts. They demonstrate that as adults, we have two choices when it comes to our formative years: we can focus on the negative and let our upbringings drag us down, or we can embrace the good, learn from the bad, and let both launch us into the rest of our lives. These two books capture those two extremes, and here, it is only the latter that succeeds. And so, I recommend only *Where's My Wand?* (along with the suggestion to check it out from a library rather than purchase it).

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## **Nicole says**

Some pretty funny and equally endearing stories about a tough childhood. It bothered me a bit that the book turned into a religious soul-search, but I was able to accept it as part of the author's journey with magic. And, am I the only one who was annoyed that the book is called "Where's My Wand?" but he doesn't actually use a wand in the book, EVER? It should be called "Where's My Chenille Endora Blanket?"

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