

The Time of Our Lives
Tom Brokaw

I sometimes approach, with some reluctance, books that look at times past with nostalgia for what we have lost and what we miss. Even though I can wax as nostalgic as the next person for what people my age remember as easier, simpler times, I feel as though I need to celebrate many aspects of our lives today. It is, after all, the real “home” of my children and grandchildren.

Tom Brokaw manages to accomplish several important things in *The Time of Our Lives*. He does enjoy looking back through his life and the corresponding events and changes in our society, but he also examines the present and offers some suggestions on various topics as we look to the future. Brokaw offers that perhaps the most often repeated question that people ask him is “Will our children and grandchildren have better lives than us?” As he suggests, there are no “simple, reassuring answers” to that question, which has led him to suggest that it is “time for an American conversation about legacy and destiny.”

Brokaw covers a lot of ground in this book, looking at various aspects of our lives as a nation. The first section explores our educational system from kindergarten through college and how we spend our money including probably the most major purchase we make – a house. He has watched houses grow in size over the last several decades, and until recently, people have been able to buy such houses with little or no money down. That was until the bubble burst and as he says, “the landscape was littered with foreclosures, abandoned homes, unfinished developments and failed lending institutions.” The American dream of owning one’s own home had become “worse than a nightmare.”

Brokaw feels that the dream has not completely vanished, but people will learn to plan carefully and buy carefully. For those who do own a home, he offers some questions about the value of that home today in relationship to its original cost, and asks perhaps the unthinkable for many people, “Could you be just as happy in a smaller home?” This is just one example of the kinds of topics and the structure of the book.

This book has an interesting format with each chapter beginning with a fact and two or three questions before Brokaw begins his discussion. Each chapter contains his analysis of the past, present and what he calls the “promise” of the future. Although there are connections among some of the chapters, each can be read and digested on its own. Brokaw’s style is conversational and very readable which supports his goal of setting in motion a national conversation about the issues of our times.

Brokaw’s perspective on the United States covers some of the most important events of the last five decades. After all this time and all that he has seen and reported on as a journalist, his is still a message of hope for the future, and I share that hope.

The Time of Our Lives is published in hardcover by Random House and retails for \$26.