Friends Like These by Danny Wallace

Danny Wallace is about to turn thirty and his life has become a cliche. Recently married and living in a smart new area of town, he's swapped pints for lattes and had even contemplated buying coasters. Something wasn't right - he was feeling way too grown-up. Until - Danny finds an old address book containing just twelve names. His best mates as a kid. Where are they now? Who are they now? And how are they coping with this scary concept of being grown-up? And so begins a journey from A-Z, tracking down and meeting his old gang. He travels from Berlin to Tokyo, from Sydney to LA. He even goes to Loughborough. He meets Fijian chiefs. German rappers. Some ninjas. And a carvery manager who's managed to solve time travel. But how will they respond to a man they haven't seen in twenty years, turning up and asking if they're coming out to play? Friends Like These is the story of what can happen when you track down your past, and of where the friendships you thought you'd outgrown can take you today...

Reviews of the Friends Like These by Danny Wallace

Zeli

This was a random recommendation based on some other books I had liked on GoodReads, and it
was SO On The Mark!!! Loved it. This is an author I would love to have a beer with, and I'd buy if he kept telling his stories. Read the excerpts available, if you like them at all, you will enjoy the book even more. I've recommended this book to a few friends, and so far their feelings have been "LOL" all the way.

Brannylv

It starts out a little slow but stick with it. These a heart warming "moral" coming about the importance of friends and turning 30!

Whitestone

Along the same lines as Yes Man and Join Me, but not as funny, and not as great a topic.

ChallengeMine

If FRIENDS LIKE THESE were a British sitcom, it would be along the lines of GOOD NEIGHBORS (THE GOOD LIFE) or DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE. It's not biting, searing satire but instead often very funny, even handed and genuinely pleasant.

Danny Wallace plays down his celebrity (how different this book would be if he were an American) and basically spends time with childhood friends. Instead of launching yet another thinly-veiled franchise of friend-finding, like a workbook, stationery, form emails, a "friend journal," aromatic cachets and candles as some books dealing with the subject of introspection and relationship, he simply jots down, sometimes in infinite detail, his letting go of childhood and yet reaching back to it in order to enrich his adult life.

Wallace had a diverse group of friends and sometimes his journeys take him to the far reaches. One is a prankster with whom he is compelled to settle a long-standing gag and is the only time the book really ventures into "PG" territory, but it is very funny indeed and wonderfully absurdist.

Overall, his writing is very jaunty and unpretentious, with a penchant for repetition -- often reinserting phrases for comic effect -- which I enjoy but might be a little too much of a good thing for others.

But even though I’m not in his generation I can identify with the need to reconnect with one’s past. It’s not about politics or differences but how we are the same in one way or another.

The world needs more books like this.

Walianirv

Danny Wallace, U.K. television personality and writer, is best known in this country for "Yes Man," the book on which a recent Jim Carey movie was based. Unlike the movie, however, Wallace’s book purports to be non-fiction. He claims to have actually said "yes" to every invitation or opportunity put to him over a six-month period and seems to have largely benefitted from the experience. I mention this to emphasize the kind of wacky personality Danny Wallace seems to have and because "Friends Like These" is another of Wallace’s off-center memoirs.

Fast approaching thirty years of age in 2006, the calendar-age Danny Wallace considers the start of adulthood, Wallace finds that he has no desire to become an adult. In fact, the very idea of becoming an adult terrifies him. So when an old address book he hasn’t seen in years turns up, it seems only natural to him that he should look up his twelve best childhood friends. After all, they, too, are on the verge of turning thirty years old.

Wallace’s task is made a bit more difficult than it might have otherwise been by the fact that he spent some of his childhood years in Scotland, some in Germany, and some in England.
Nevertheless, blessed with what seems to be a saint of a wife who encourages him to do it, he confidently embarks on a personal quest to "update his address book" before the birthday that will magically turn him into "a man." How, he wonders, are his friends handling their own personal traumas of becoming adults with adult responsibilities?

On the whole, it appears that they are handling their thirtieths a bit more successfully than Danny is handling his. Despite having been warned that he would find all his old friends working in IT, Danny actually finds them filling a variety of roles. Among his personal Top 12, are a research doctor, a hip-hop rapper, a restaurant manager, a newspaperman, and one old friend who actually does work in the IT department of a major bank. Danny's search, equal amounts adventure and misadventure, will ultimately take him across the world and require stops in the United States, Australia and Japan. Best of all for Danny, is that, for the first time in his life, he will come away from a project with the sense that he has finished something he started - a goal he never achieved as a kid.

Danny Wallace is a funny man, and a clever writer, and he fills Friends Like These with numerous incidents that will make the reader wonder how such a hapless adventurer could possibly accomplish so much. After all, a man who manages to wedge himself so tightly into a tiny Japanese toilet stall (Danny is a big man and he was wearing a backpack at the time) that he has to cry for help before sheer panic sets in does little to inspire confidence, does he?

"Friends Like These" is more than slapstick comedy. Wallace has a way with words that allows him to pepper the reader with little one-line zingers almost at will, one-liners that always produce at least a smile, and sometimes much more. No matter the situation, he maintains his sense-of-humor and laughs at himself as much as his readers will laugh at him. At 400 pages, however, some of Wallace's efforts and friend descriptions begin to become repetitious and hard to distinguish from one another, a flaw that will have some readers wishing that he would just get on with it.

This is a funny book but it does prove the point that sometimes "less is more."

Rated at: 3.5

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