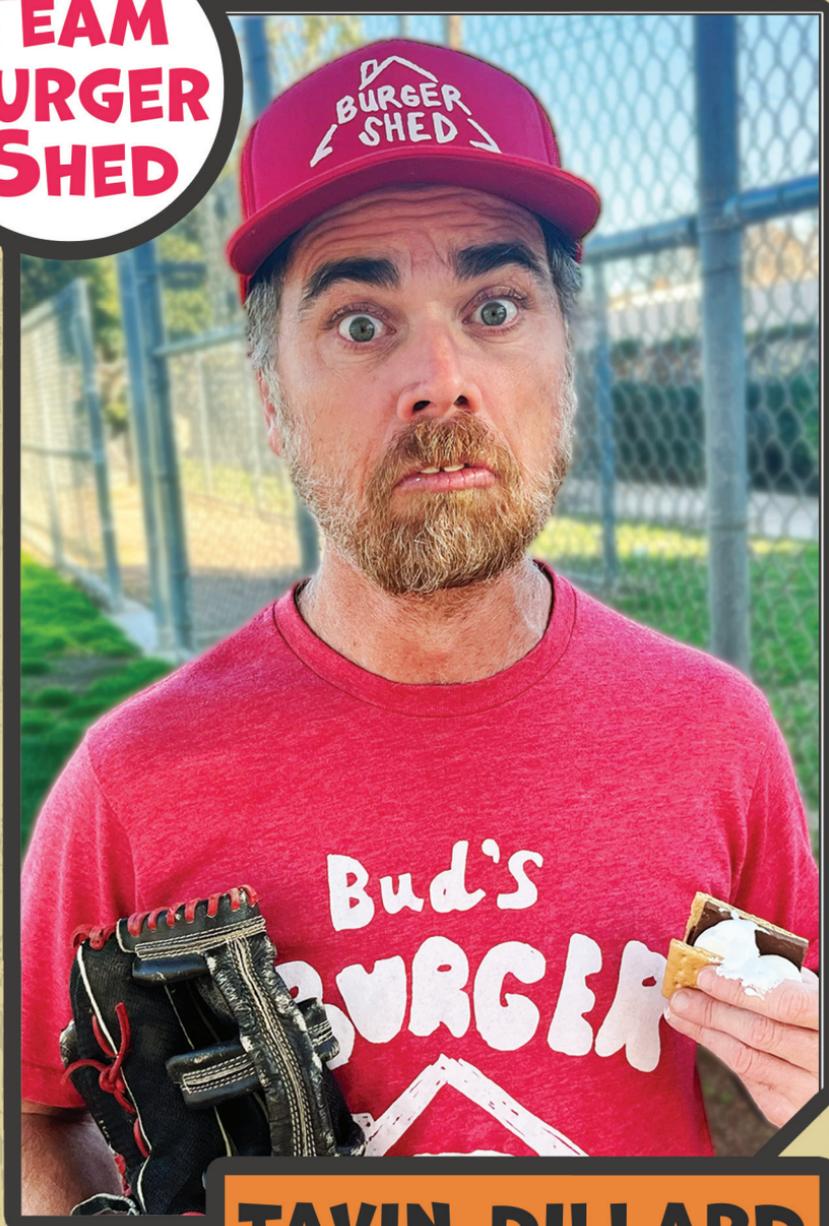


"THIS BOOK GOES GREAT WITH ANY DONUT!"

**- CHERYL GRUBBS, OWNER
DONUT GOALS**

**TEAM
BURGER
SHED**



THE BOOK

TAVIN DILLARD

FOREWORD

Some people say, “I can’t recommend this enough!” But some people add a period. “I can’t recommend this. Enough!” That’s how close we are to saying the exact opposite. One teensy little punctuation mark.

I’m S. D. Smith, author of *Mooses with Bazookas: And Other Stories Children Should Never Read*. So, you should probably take me very seriously as a very serious author of very serious books that are serious.

I grew up in the hills and hollers of West Virginia. Well, not all of them, but you get the idea. My dad said we lived so far back in the woods that no one lived behind us. I thought he was serious for the longest time.

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I was in California for some reason once, and there was a guy from Arkansas there who said he was glad I was there so no one would make fun of him. He saw me as a kind of protective hillbilly shield. True story. We became friends because one thing is, people from Arkansas and West Virginia don't usually get too big for their britches. There's another feller from Arkansas who I also met in California. (If you take nothing else away from this, Sherlock, you have learned that the best place to meet Arkansans is in California.) Anyway, this new Arkansan was named Tavin Dillard. Still is named Tavin Dillard. He's kept it this entire time. Matter of fact, you're holding his book right now.

Despite the abuse some Arkansans have heaped upon me and my people, I love Tavin Dillard. He is a legend in my home and in his own watermelon-helmet-covered mind. What you are about to read will do you real good, especially if you are eager for chuckles. Chuckles are hard to come by these days, with inflation what it is. Do yourself a favor and enjoy this literary feast. Is it more sno-cones, hot fries, and donuts than a fancy French dinner? Yes. Thank goodness.

I cannot recommend this enough!

S. D. Smith

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Some things are easy for folks. Like rampin' a bike over a creek is easy for Rusty Tidwell. Then sometimes easy things are hard. Like it's easy for me to drink a glass of milk, but Mort Dwydell can't have no dairy.

We all got our things, and when it's happenin' to you it's a big deal. That's just how it is.

So, what if I seen a gal, who ain't lived in my town in years, deliverin' produce to the Burger Shed?

Just go say hi to her, Tavin, you might say.

Next time I see her, I'm liable to. It ain't that it's hard; it just ain't easy. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

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I have gotten pretty good at lawn mowin'. I'll tell ya right now that there is a whole lot that comes along with this job. A whole lot.

Like what, Tavin?

I'm glad ya asked. Firstlys, people want to talk. They want to chat about the weather, produce, their grandbabies, you name it. And you know what I do? I listen.

And folks is always cookin'. You know about that? They want to share food with anybody that stops by and, as a lawnmowin' man, I'm always stoppin' by.

One day recently I mowed Imogene and Raymond Watkins's lawn. If you know anything about Raymond and Imogene's house, you know they got a nice porch swing to the left of the front door. And it's about six or seven steps to get onto that porch.

So, I'm basically done with their lawn. It's a good size lawn, and their backyard ain't small neither. And here I am done with the work. Imogene steps out on the front porch and asks me that very same thing.

"You all done?"

"Sure am, Imogene!" I hollered back.

Raymond was messin' with the flower bed in front of their porch while Imogene waved me over.

Now, I didn't know if she had some cookies, bread,

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casserole, or some old sweat breeches she wanted to pass off to me, but I figure it was somethin'. Then she told me, "I got some ice water for ya."

I'm used to Imogene doin' that, so I don't usually bring no water to drink when I mow her lawn.

And then Raymond chimed in, "She makes a real good glass of ice water."

"Don't I know it," I hollered back to Raymond.

I leave my mower there on the front lawn, along with my bike, and head up them steps into their house, followin' Imogene.

Once you step into Imogene and Raymond's house, there's a sittin' room on the left. That's where you sit. To the right is a livin' room. That's where you live.

"Take a seat there, Tavin. I'll be back directly," Imogene calls as she shuffles into the kitchen.

So, I take a seat in the sittin' room. There's a couple small couches there that face each other. Between them is a glass coffee table that's got that plastic fruit in a bowl. It ain't real food. Don't try and eat it. Lesson learned. But if you do, just turn the fruit over.

Before too long Imogene makes her way back to the sittin' room with a big ol' glass of ice water. Like a heavy glass. She don't believe in paper or plastic

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throwaway picnic cups. Even at a picnic, she says, “Them drinks sure would taste better in a real glass.”

The glass is heavy. Imogene don’t care. She even told me.

“You know, Raymond and I go through a gallon of milk a week. We got strong bones.”

“Is that so, Imogene?”

“Oh, yeah. I fell off the back porch last week and didn’t get hurt at all.”

“Really?” I asked her as she got closer with that big ol’ glass of ice water.

“That’s right, but I can’t say the same for the azalea bush.”

And Imogene just snickers about that. She finally hands me the glass of water. Raymond was right. She makes a good glass of ice water.

Now in her other hand she was holdin’ somethin’. I really wasn’t sure what, mostly because I was focused on the water. Then she extended her hand out to me. And you know how when somebody offers you somethin’ you just instinctively reach your hand out to take what they’re offerin’? Well, that’s what I did.

I set down the water and just reach out to take whatever Imogene is givin’ me. And she’s so happy to share.

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Reason how come I know is because she's smilin' ear to ear.

Now, I'm lookin' in my hand and what I see is a very black nanner.¹

I'm lookin' at that thing, and I start to wonder if she's puttin' a dead crow in my hand. But then I was thinkin' that I don't see no beak on that thing. And I figure Imogene wouldn't have taken the time to de-beak a crow.

It's all happenin' so fast, and this is where my mind is goin'. So, now I got a pitch-black nanner in my hand, and I don't want to be rude, but I don't know what to do. It's way overripe. I mean a midnight, pitch-black, lights out, not-wakin'-up nanner.

It ain't just that I'm holdin' that nasty thing in my hand like a baby hairless cat, but I'm also gettin' the sense that Imogene wants me to do somethin' with that nanner right now. Thing about it is, I don't want to do anything with it except throw it away.

At this point, I start hatchin' my own plan, as they say. Like a crow egg from a healthy crow. I'm thinkin' that maybe I can get out of here with this black nanner and make it up to Hank Thistle's yard.

Hank's got a burn pile goin' year-round. I figure

1. *Editor's note: A very black banana.*

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if I can get up there, that I'll throw this very black, get-under-the-covers-close-your-eyes nanner right on that burn pile. Sounds like a good idea to me.

One thing I ain't mentioned yet is that this nanner is pretty tender. You know how black it is, but it's also tender like Myron Curtis's guts. I notice my thumb has kinda gone into this thing. Now I smell it.

So I try and stand up to leave. This is the time to get out of here.

I start to thank Imogene for the gifts. As I stand, *she* stands and reaches out and just taps both my shoulders like the wings of a crow.

“Have a seat.”

She is ready to watch me eat this thing. Now I know that there is only one way out of this house, and it's through this very black nanner. So, I sit back down, and Imogene does too. She's got her hands under her chin kinda clappin'. You know how a momma is at a school play watchin' her kid be Tree Number Three and she's so proud? That's how Imogene looked. It's like it did her heart good to see me eat healthy.

Here I am sittin' with this black nanner while Imogene perches across from me. I don't dry heave in front of her. But I do try to peel this thing. It is way overripe. Blindfold yourself, sit in a closet, close

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the door, and you can't see that nanner. Pitch-black.

I'm like a toddler with a sloppy joe. Truth be told, I'm like an adult with a sloppy joe. I figure I gotta start gettin' this down instead of spreadin' it everywhere. So, I start eatin' this nanner out of the palm of my hand.

Only thing is, I can't tell what's nanner and what's peel. I don't want to eat the peel. And Imogene is across from me just so happy. Like this is all goin' exactly how she hoped.

I don't even know what to do at this point. I ain't never ate a hairless cat before, but I got to think that I'm gettin' close to what it would be like. I was lickin' that thing—in between my fingers, now it's on the back of my hand, everywhere. I look over and lock eyes with Imogene. All the while my hands are covered, draped, marinated in very black nanner. I mean very black.

She looks like she just won free tickets to the County Fair Barbecue Picnic Pavilion. And they have them free sodas there too.

She is startin' to notice the mess and asks if I need a napkin. I tell her I do, and she hurries out, returnin' with a tiny tissue. And I'm pretty sure it was one ply.

Well, she drops that in my hand, and it basically disappears. Now I don't know what's nanner, what's

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peel, and what's tissue. I know I can't eat it all because then I'd be eatin' peel and tissue for sure. So, I decide to make a move.

I stand up and try to maneuver out of that sittin' room. And she lets me go! So, now I'm headin' toward the front door, both hands covered in very black nanner, and I got no idea how I'm gonna get that doorknob.

Imogene shuffles by and grabs the doorknob for me. Thank you, Imogene.

Well, I get on that front porch and look down at them hands of mine. I close my hands, and it sounds like a bike tire goin' through mud—nanner squishin' everywhere.

I head down them porch steps, and now I'm lookin' down at my shirt. I gotta get this nanner off my hands. I'm gonna have to go home and change my shirt in the middle of the day if I do that. Then I look out over Imogene and Raymond Watkin's freshly mowed lawn.

I step onto that lawn, drop to my knees, and start wipin' my hands all over it. Then from behind me I hear, "You sure like your job, don't ya?"

I peek back over my shoulder, and there is Raymond on that porch swing thinkin' I'm down there

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on my hands and knees just enjoyin' that fresh-cut lawn I mowed.

"I sure do. I really do, Raymond," I call back as I rise to my feet.

Then I do one of them straight-legged walk-runs when you want to get out of somewhere, but you don't want them to think you're sprintin' away. I tie my lawnmower to my bike seat with my rope, and I'm outta there!

It wasn't too long before I rode past Hank Thistle's burn pile. And today it smelled a little like leaves and a whole lot like regret.

I end up goin' back to the trailer to clean up anyway. I figure I'd rather smell like Pert Plus than black nanner. So, I did that and then went to fetch some lunch.

As I walk into the Burger Shed, there in a booth is Mort Dwydell and Myron Curtis. Myron's back is to the door, but I know what he looks like. Mort is facin' the door.

Bud saw me walk in, and they start gettin' my number three combo meal started. That's a bacon double cheeseburger, Dr Pepper, and curly fries. Myron turns around in that booth, and his eyes is all wide like a possum in a trash can.

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He waves me over to the booth, and I can tell somethin' is goin' on. They are steady thinkin' hard like they're workin' on remedial fractions. So, I make it over to their booth, and Myron just says, "Tavin, it's softball season."

"Okay, Myron."

Let me give you some background on town softball in case this ain't somethin' that happens in your neck of the woods. First of all, it's always goin' like a mighty river. It's just always there. Softball don't stop. No big deal, right?

Well, as Myron extends the invite on this afternoon in the Burger Shed, somethin' grabs me. I even think I hear a little bit of "Chariots of Fire." I get lost in the moment for a bit.

For some reason I see this picture of the adult softball season for what it really is: stories told, legends bein' born, friendships strengthened, a mild resemblance to exercise, and free sno-cones on Thursday nights if your team wins.

"Hey, Tavin! You there?"

Mort Dwydell bolts to attention and is now standin' next to me. He is lookin' like he's ready to jump to action.

"I thought you had a stroke, Tavin. I was ready to

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do the Heimlich on you,” Mort exclaimed.

I was like, “I don’t think that’s how it works, Mort.”

They asked me if I was in. I told them I sure was. That’s when Myron said, “Great. That’ll be twenty dollars.”

So I hand over some of that hard-earned cash that I had to endure a black nanner for. I figure since I was in now I should be able to ask questions. So, I do.

“What’s our team name?”

“We ain’t got a name yet, Tavin.”

“You got a sponsor?”

“No, we ain’t got no sponsor.”

“Well, that usually helps you with the team name.”

Myron nods.

I think, well if they ain’t got a name and they ain’t got a sponsor, the next logical question is, “What *can* you tell me, Myron?”

He said, “We need two more guys for a full roster.”

So, quick math tells me they needed three when I walked into the Burger Shed, and now they only need two more players.

Myron proceeds to assure me that once they get the rest of the roster filled out, he’d order the uniforms, and they would be at the fields the first game next

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week. Myron and Mort got softball deadlines steady comin' at them, so they gonna be busy this week.

Now, about this time Mary Beth Tucker enters the Burger Shed. She's my best friend Russell Tucker's little sister. She got married young, right out of high school, and that didn't work out. She's a good ol' girl. She went to school for horses. Her and Russell come from kinda husky stock. She's a smart girl, knows a lot about animals, and works down at the veterinary.

Myron seen her walk in there, and he can't take his eyes off her. He's wide-eyed. No poker face or nothin'.

Mort says, "Why don't you take a picture; it'll last longer."

And Myron's like, "I ain't no weirdo!"

I said, "Easy, fellas. We're all friends here."

Then I just call out to her, "Hey, Mary Beth!"

She says hey and makes her way over to our booth. I guess she is in there for some lunch. She don't seem to be in a big rush. She asks how we're doin'. Mort tells her that we are gettin' ready for softball season.

That's when Mary Beth says she'll be workin' the concession stand at the fields this season.

Well, Myron is still flustered, and like any good

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friend I just say, “Hey, Mary Beth, Myron’s got some-
thin’ to say to you.”

So, she turns and looks right at Myron. Truth be
told, I thought he’d stay flustered, but he gets steady
focused! Myron pulled it together in the moment.

He clears his throat and says, “Mary Beth, I got a
new moped here recently for my birthday. It’d be my
honor if I could pick you up tonight and take you to
Bickham’s All You Can Eat Catfish Buffet.”

I’m shocked.

Mary Beth says, “Well, that sounds fun, Myron.
How ’bout six thirty?”

He nods. Bud calls Mary Beth’s order. Just a few
moments ago Myron was bumblin’ to pull our softball
season together, and now he’s got a date on his moped
with Mary Beth Tucker to the catfish buffet.

Kinda made me think the next time I see that
produce delivery gal I’ll say hi. If Myron can do it,
so can I.

And if Myron can talk to Mary Beth Tucker, he
can have our roster full and uniforms ready at the
fields for our first game next week.

I should probably start stretchin’ my haunches
now. I mean, I can play some ball, but I’m still a com-
mon man. So, I got to get ready. Preseason is upon us.

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Next week we'll be together as a team with no name, stories will be born, legends will be made, and hopefully, I'll be gettin' a free sno-cone served up by Mary Beth Tucker at the concession stand.