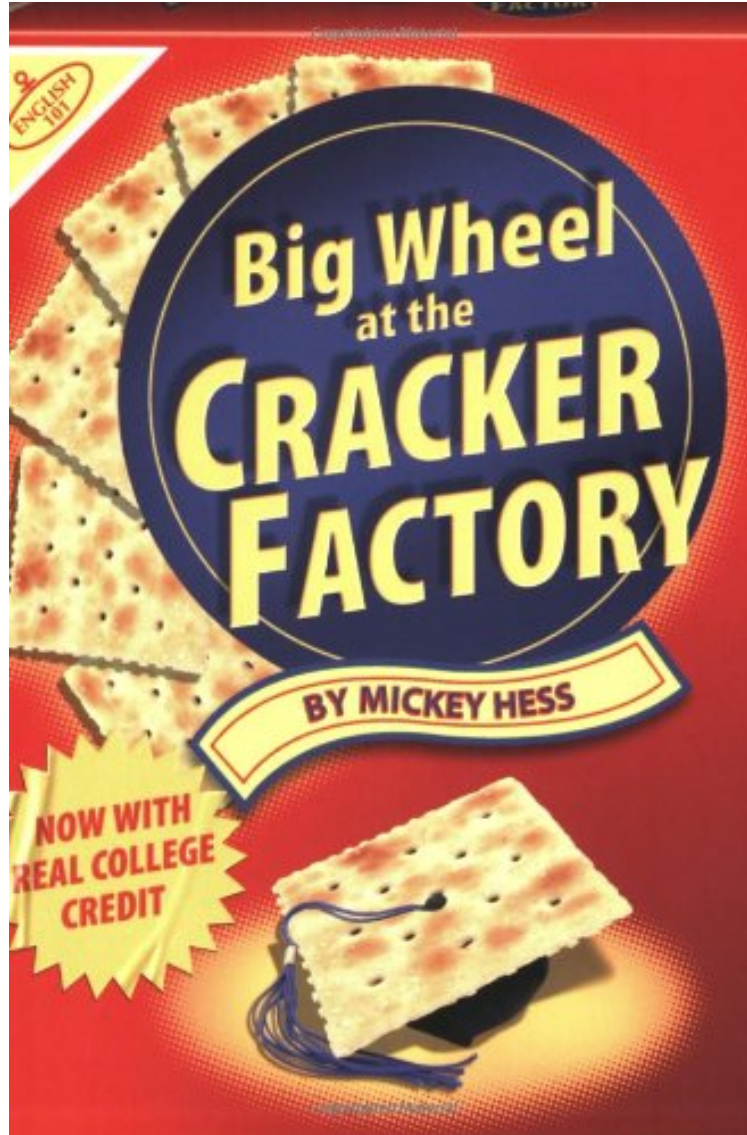


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## Big Wheel at the Cracker Factory

*Mickey Hess*

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**Mickey Hess : Big Wheel at the Cracker Factory** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Big Wheel at the Cracker Factory:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great ReadBy kujoshMy cousin wrote this book. It's funny as all get out. If you like a good laugh, you'll enjoy this read.9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Funny and InsightfulBy Next Exit TravelTechnically a memoir, but also a look at jobs, decisions, dreams, influences and how to find meaning. The period this book covers is approximately 2000-2002, where Mickey finds himself in his post-

college days with part-time teaching jobs, but also random gigs as an ice cream truck driver, stand-up comedian, and arcade attendant. He pokes fun at the colleges he works at, just as he does the "ridiculous" jobs. He is caught between a job he almost seems afraid to care about and those that amuse him. For our generation, and I am going to assume Mickey and I are almost exactly the same age, work has a different place in our lives. We know that bad things happen to good employees and that most people change jobs (and careers) repeatedly these days. We've watched jobs shipped overseas, fear layoffs, and seen how corporations have kept the minimum wage ridiculously low. We are a generation of cynics, but what happens when cynics find jobs with meaning? What happens when you find that you can't keep up the façade of youth and irresponsibility forever? The book is insightful, but also funny as hell. The scene where they are housesitting and a friend breaks the toilet tank in the middle of the night made me laugh out loud. Mickey has great comedic timing with a deadpan delivery. Highly recommended. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. At what point does a job become a career? By Sean D. Stewart Is it possible to find a job you love and not let it take over your life? Does a person need a "career" in order to live a fulfilled life? Does work always have to define one's identity? Mickey Hess feels these questions hammering in his head constantly. Coincidentally, so do I, as do probably a whole host of other Gen Xers. It's almost as if we have been conditioned to distrust the paths that so many of our parents traveled. The concept of choosing a field and devoting one's entire life to working in that field seems almost incomprehensible. And, yet, that is what Mickey Hess feels is happening to him. Hess is a part-time college instructor. He sometimes teaches at three different universities in one day in an effort to make ends meet. In addition to juggling multiple teaching gigs, he takes odd jobs on the side, none of which he manages to keep for more than a couple of months. Hess waits tables, works at a giant indoor amusement park, drives an ice cream truck, and performs stand-up comedy. At one point, he even gets a job at a Billy Graham Crusade, where he spends most of his time handing out his own homemade fliers advertising fictitious Billy Graham corn dogs. As these jobs increase in absurdity, Hess realizes that he's using them, in part, to distract himself from the decision he needs to make: should he commit to fulfilling his desire to be a college professor? All around him, his friends are going through the same process: struggling with how they spend their time, mired in the details of preparing for careers they're not even sure they want. At one point, Hess confesses, "I've never made any strong decisions that have brought me to where I am now." When I read that, I knew exactly what he meant. In the wrong hands, these familiar themes that Hess grapples with might not make for such engaging reading. However, Mickey Hess is a likeable guy and he spins a colorful story. His sincerity and subtle humor preclude any chance of self-pity entering this tale. Hess easily garners the reader's sympathy. It's not that he is lazy or has a poor work ethic; after all, he spends hours working on his own writing. But he likes to enjoy his life, to spend time with his friends and family, and he hasn't figured out how work fits into the equation. It's a common problem that many of us deal with on a daily basis. In the end, Hess makes a decision, although it doesn't seem any stronger than any of the previous ones he's described. His new situation leads him to pose new questions, and it's clear that he's probably still a long way off from getting it all figured out. But that's okay, because these are monumental questions and he's got his whole lifetime ahead to grapple with them. And, meanwhile, the rest of us can take comfort in knowing we're not the only ones asking, "Where does it all end?"

Big Wheel at the Cracker Factory is about choosing what you want to be when you grow up, and finding out you still have to wait tables on the weekends. The book follows one year in the life of an adjunct instructor who takes on side jobs as an ice cream man, stand-up comedian, haunted house character, and Billy Graham Crusader.

"It's a light-hearted look dealing with that period in life when you have to go from being a reckless youth to an adult, without sacrificing anything. That's hard to do and for some people it just paralyzes them." -- James Furbush, *The Sly Oyster* Big Wheel at the Cracker Factory is an absolute winner, exploring the difficulties and trials of finding a job, facing a lifetime of work, and searching for meaning somewhere within that work. Mickey Hess writes with truthful insights and rip-roaring hilarity. The fact that it is non-fiction only makes the book that much more important and engaging. -- Joe Meno, author of *Hairstyles of the Damned* Like White Noise, without the angst or postmodernism. -- Al Burian, author of *Burn Collector* Mickey Hess has taken his experiences as a struggling writing instructor and made them into a wry, picaresque novel. Thoroughly humorous. -- Cleveland Plain-Dealer Mickey Hess makes you want to move to Kentucky and hang out and write poetry for the rest of your life. -- David Amram, author of *Offbeat: Collaborating with Kerouac* Underground publishing advocate Mickey Hess uses deadpan humor and pungent observations to describe the price he pays for pursuing a passion -- teach college students how to write. -- Chicago Reader, which awarded Big Wheel "Critics Choice" From the Back Cover When Mickey Hess discovers that he can list his experience as a college instructor on an application to work as an ice cream man -- and still get the job -- he starts to wonder if being a professor has lost its prestige. With college enrollment and tuition costs at record highs, universities are staffing their courses with part-time instructors who commute between different schools to make a living. Big Wheel follows one year in the life of an adjunct instructor who takes on side jobs as an ice cream man, stand-up comedian, haunted house character, and Billy Graham Crusader. The jobs begin out of financial necessity, but become more of a diversion from a teaching career that Hess fears he is starting to take far more seriously than this

employers are taking him. About the Author Mickey Hess taught part-time for several universities in Kentucky and Indiana before moving to his current position as Assistant Professor of English at Rider University. His books include *Icons of Hip Hop*, and *Is Hip Hop Dead?* His writing has appeared in *Ninth Letter*, *Punk Planet*, and *Created in Darkness* by *Troubled Americans: The Best of McSweeney's*, Humor Category. He lives in Philadelphia.