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The Baby Train: And Other Lusty Urban Legends



Synopsis

America's foremost folk-detective is back on the case, sniffing out those zany but dubious stories that "really happened" to a friend of your sister's boyfriend's accountant. In "The Baby Train", Jan Harold Brunvand tracks the most fabulous tales making today's dinner party circuit, showing why those stories that sound too good to be true probably are too good to be true. Revealed here are the mysteries behind some of the goriest ("Accidental Cannibal", "The Body in the Bed"), funniest ("The Failed Suicide", "The Hairdresser's Error"), bawdiest, ("The Shocking Videotape", "Superhero Hijinx"), most pyrotechnic ("The Exploding Bra") urban legends yet.

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Customer Reviews

Brunvand, an English professor at the University of Utah and author of four previous collections of modern folklore, including *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, here offers another engaging compilation. He groups these resonant anecdotes, found in slightly modified versions around the world, into such sections as Sex and Scandal, and On-the-Job. In the former, the title piece tells of a train whose early morning whistle wakens couples in bed and leads to pregnancies. From the section titled Fun and Games, "Built in a Day" refers to taxi drivers' descriptions, tendered most often to tiresome American tourists, of such local monuments as the cathedral in Milan's Piazza di Duomo. Expanded from Brunvand's syndicated newspaper column, these accounts, for the most part, are attributed to the notorious FOAF--a "friend of a friend." Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Folklorist Brunvand has compiled another collection of stories originally published in his nationally syndicated column, "Urban Legends." The author gives a lively analysis of these contemporary folk tales, also including accounts and variations received from his readers. Although the narratives are reported as true, they were most often told by an unnamed "friend of a friend" and involved outrageous antics or unbelievable coincidences. The study reveals recurrent motifs and concludes with "A Type-Index of Urban Legends" classifying the tales from all five of Brunvand's books. Not as informative as *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (LJ 10/15/81), but equally entertaining.- Eloise R. Hitchcock, Tennessee Technological Univ. Lib., CookevilleCopyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Jan Harold Brunvand wrote this book as the fifth installment in his urban legend series that begins with *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*. It tells us a little bit about the common forms of these stories and the mental processes that shape them. Then it does its primary job of telling interesting, mostly untrue stories that happened to "a friend of a friend."The book's title story is about an unusually high birth rate in a small western town. It was supposedly caused by a train which regularly blew its whistle going through the town each morning at 4 AM, waking many of the residents. Since it was too early to get up and too late to go back to sleep... the town had a higher than usual birth rate. In some versions of the story, the railroad changes the train schedule to ease the population explosion. In others, some families are immune because of deafness, shift work, or other factors. Other interesting stories are organized into categories of horror, crime, work, fun and games, foreign relations, animal legends, and academic legends. The absence of a chapter of urban legends with sexual themes sets this book apart from previous volumes. Perhaps that well has run dry. A few favorites:- A family assumes the tin of unlabeled brown powder mailed to them by relatives is coffee. Too late they learn it was their cremated grandmother.- A flight attendant is unobtrusively wearing an inflatable bra under her uniform. Suddenly, the airplane cabin depressurizes...- A thrifty pet owner splints his budgie's leg with wooden matches to save a trip to the vet. The bird scratches the newspapers in its cage with the as-yet unlit match.- Before computers, university students were assigned to classes by clerks. One year they juggled the freshman English class assignments to fill one section with students whose last name was an animal name (Bird, Fox, Deere, etc.).The stories are entertaining and the author's observations are illuminating. For a more serious discussion of folklore, see the most recent version of Brunvand's text, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*.

The Baby Train and Other Lusty Urban Legends, when picking up this book I had no idea what it was. All I knew is that title took hold of my attention and I was lost in the book. This book is one many urban legend quickreads. What's best about this one is that there are so many that can be close to home or some that we already may have heard of. This is one out five urban legend books written by the Jan Harold Brunvand. A lot of the others including this one are said to be repetitive. Although this may be true and hard to follow it helped me understand that some of the written legends can be debatably true. I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone who doesn't have interest in how cultures can connect or anyone who is looking for an easy quick read. Although it is very easy to comprehend. As I read I decided to read some of them to my mother. In doing so sparked her curiosity and how she could connect to some of these stories. I don't want to go into deep detail on the author because the way the author writes speaks for itself. The stories are entertaining and the author's observations are illuminating. Professor Brunvand provides an informative and entertaining account of urban legends (or urban myths). I recommend that readers also read his other books about urban legends. Whether you believe in urban legends or not this is a read that I highly recommend along with all the other books by Professor Brunvand.

Some of these stories are interesting and/or amusing; others are less so. Brunvand occasionally gets repetitive as he goes into great detail on the minor variations on the same story, and I also find that he is inclined to define stories as urban legends (and therefore fictional) that I am perfectly willing to believe have happened, probably many times. In fact, his title story for this book includes one person who says that her parents have always told her that it truly happened in her case, so it is no longer merely something that happened to "a friend of a friend", but can actually be traced to a specific occurrence to a specific person, yet he still leaves it as an urban legend. And I certainly believe that any number of people have lost major portions of their doctoral dissertations, if not the entirety of them, by computer crashes that happened when they hadn't been backing up their material as assiduously as they should. Brunvand's delivery of his stories is sometimes quite good, but other times is rather dry and academic.

I've always been one of those people who love to hear a good, ironic story - my alltime favourite being the babysitter who gets the crank calls - and was pleased to find this enjoyable series of books. This was my first one, and I really enjoyed it. The review posted is true in a sense, but there are so many stories out there that I doubt that Jan will ever "rewrite the same book" over and over.

Awesome book!

This book reminds me of those PBS historical programs where a subject that COULD have been fascinating is made almost boring by a dry, academic style and too much repetition of basic info. The author often includes several versions of the same story to show how it spread around the USA, or even the world. It would have benefited from some astute editing.

Professor Brunvand provides an informative and entertaining account of urban legends (or urban myths). Professor Brunvand is so revered that he was recently referred to in an episode of "Millennium" which dealt with urban myths. I recommend that readers read his other books about urban legends.

With the author not knowing anything about the history of these urban legends, he creates a fantasy world of lusty "facts" that has no historical context whatsoever. This is a terrible example of someone who has too much time on their hands.

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