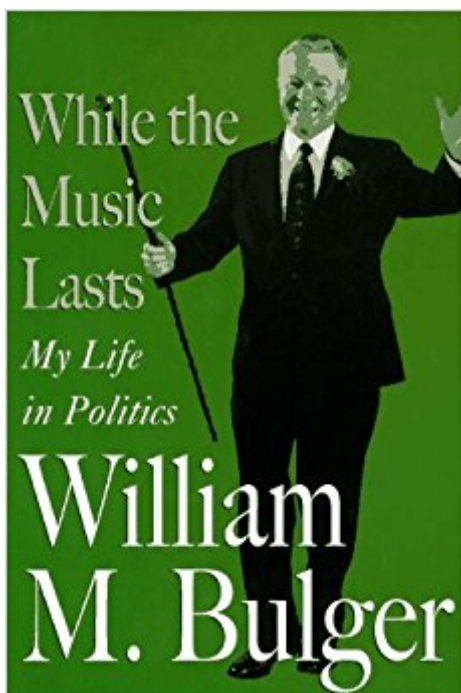


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While The Music Lasts: My Life In Politics



Synopsis

This memoir, by turns passionate and hilarious, recounts the colorful life of the man who has dominated Massachusetts state politics for more than a generation. William Bulger describes his childhood in a poor but lively and devoted family in heavily Irish South Boston - where he still lives - and his struggle for an education. He tells of his leadership when Boston was America's focal point in a fierce school busing crisis. He recounts power-brokering in one of the most independent and feisty state governments in the nation and writes about the inside game of politics in a way that invites comparison to Edwin O'Connor's *The Last Hurrah*. He affectingly makes the case for the right of neighborhoods to preserve ancestral culture from efforts to stifle diverse traditions in a rootless age. This is a book for political aficionados everywhere.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

William M. Bulger has been a formidable force in the Massachusetts Democratic party since the 1960s. He's not quite an authentic South Boston Irish (his family, it must be admitted, moved from neighboring Dorchester when he was 4), but he's become nationally recognized for representing that community, first as a state representative and later as the president of the state Senate. While *Music Lasts* is a passionate memoir, alternately hilarious and saddening, about a lifetime spent standing up for the little guy. South Boston is one of the most politically active communities in the state and, as Bulger tells the tale, one of the most misunderstood. He is particularly compelling when addressing the Boston busing crisis of the 1970s, arguing that his district's opposition to

forced desegregation was not primarily racially motivated, but rooted instead in the intense desire to raise their children as they saw fit without government interference (even when well intentioned). Political junkies from far outside Boston's city limits will enjoy Bulger's firsthand account of life in the political trenches. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Bulger was born in South Boston in 1934, the son of Irish-Catholic working-class parents. While working his way through law school, he was elected to the state House of Representatives in 1960. He found the leadership of the house inadequate and fought it so he could get his bills, most prominently his child-abuse legislation, passed. He tells wonderful stories about the famous 1962 U.S. senate race between Ted Kennedy and Eddie McCormack (he was for McCormack); his brother's prison record for bank robbery; and the legendary (at least in Massachusetts) stinginess of JFK. Bulger goes on to explain his role in the Boston busing controversies "over alleged segregation in our schools

With the Whitey Bulger trial in the news, I figured this would be an interesting read, and to a certain extent, it was. The only problem is - Billy Bulger says very little about his brother Whitey in this book. That's sort of like a book about Joe DiMaggio's life and reading very little about Marilyn Monroe in the book, don't you think? Another negative, the book is very self-serving. But it is surprisingly well-written for a non-writer.]

This book is rather hard going for someone who is unfamiliar with the history of the author and the politics of his state. It is however readable despite these problems. It is not entirely clear what if anything the author stood for in his time in politics. The main discussion in the book concerns the author's opposition to the busing issue. Whilst to people outside America busing seemed a socially progressive move one can understand how it would have disrupted a local community and how there would be opposition to it. The writer however is a good hater. With the busing issue and with his conflict with Alan Desrhowitz he can certainly dish out the abuse. In doing so he tends to lose the reader as it is not clear exactly what has led to the torrent of abuse. It would appear that the author was also a "controversial politician". A good deal of the book is devoted to discussing various corruption scandals and putting forward innocent explanations of various things. It is a shame that the writer does not put in more background so that the readers who live outside the north east of the United States know what he was going on about. If the book contained that information it would be a valuable insight into a colorful and interesting character.

it's OK, if you are from Southie or know his brother

This is an informative, interesting, well-written book. Senator Bulger (now retired) seems to model his book's structure on James Michael Curley's *I'd Do It Again - Autobiography of James Michael Curley*, which is also an excellent introduction to Boston politics as it existed prior to Senator Bulger's book. Senator Bulger mentions at the outset that he modeled his career on that of Governor Curley. Senator Bulger discusses his family's Irish roots, his childhood growing up in Boston, family life and neighborhoods in South Boston, his military career in the US Army, and his decision to enter Boston politics. Senator Bulger was a Commonwealth representative from 1960 to 1970, and a Commonwealth senator from 1970 to 1994. The usual cast of Boston characters are here: the kind, the trusting, the sincere and the insincere, and the downright deplorably devious. They're the same folks you meet on any Boston street, for that matter. The book is comprised largely of significant vignettes - both political and personal - during Senator Bulger's 18-year presidency of the Massachusetts Senate (1978-1996). The stories are well-told and fascinating: the forced busing in South Boston, which he presents as a classic confrontation of positive law versus natural law; his confrontation with Alan Dershowitz, whom he obviously disliked; the tricks of the trade of Boston politics, which are interesting and funny; and his personal assessments of the many politicians, businessmen, and power players of his days in politics. If you live in Boston, or are interested in Boston, or are engaged in any political work, this book is time and money well spent. For more on Boston history, see Nathaniel Philbrick's excellent *Bunker Hill: A City, A Siege, A Revolution*.

Former Massachusetts State Senate President William Bulger's autobiography provides readers insights into the inner workings of his state's politics and into legislative affairs. In addition, it provides many personal insights into the rise of a man from a working class South Boston neighborhood to legislative leadership. A primary lesson Senator Bulger wishes to convey is that politicians should be driven by their belief they can make a difference. They should continue at politics "while the music lasts" and they can still hear that music that lets them know they can create the changes for which they fight. Mr. Bulger's advice to legislators is to learn facts and data when arguing the merits of their proposals. He believes good research is more valuable than good rhetoric. He recommends that legislators avoid creating divisions amongst their peers and to avoid choosing sides too soon when these divisions occur. For that reason, he followed a rule of avoiding discussing divisions with the media, whom he believes fuels these divisions. Senator Bulger was a

practitioner of the art of compromise, although he states that moral principle should always come first. The book provides a good description of the two year fight Senator Bulger had in passing key child care legislation. Part of his struggle included withdrawing his name as sponsor in order to pick up votes to pass it. The book also provides the author's insights into the very heated school busing issue. This book is a great resource for readers wishing to learn more about the legislative process, about Massachusetts politics, or the insights of a colorful politician from South Boston.

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