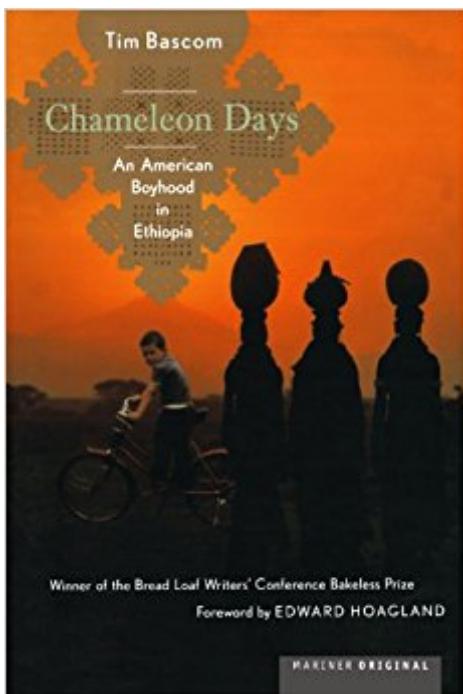


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# Chameleon Days: An American Boyhood In Ethiopia



## Synopsis

In 1964, at the age of three, Tim Bascom is thrust into a world of eucalyptus trees and stampeding baboons when his family moves from the Midwest to Ethiopia. The unflinchingly observant narrator of this memoir reveals his missionary parents' struggles in a sometimes hostile country. Sent reluctantly to boarding school in the capital, young Tim finds that beyond the gates enclosing that peculiar, isolated world, conflict roils Ethiopian society. When secret riot drills at school are followed with an attack by rampaging students near his parents' mission station, Tim witnesses the disintegration of his family's African idyll as Haile Selassie's empire begins to crumble. Like Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let Go to the Dogs Tonight*, *Chameleon Days* chronicles social upheaval through the keen yet naive eyes of a child. Bascom offers readers a fascinating glimpse of missionary life, much as Barbara Kingsolver did in *The Poisonwood Bible*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In 1964, three-year-old Bascom and his two brothers were uprooted from Kansas via Missouri by their missionary parents and taken to the family's personal Oz in Ethiopia. Bascom's father was a doctor, and the family went first to an established mission hospital in Soddo, then in 1967 to a nascent outpost in Liemo. In Ethiopia, Tim and his older brother, Johnathan, attended boarding school—American children walled in from their African neighbors. Bascom's recollections of moments and conversations from his childhood are narrated with delightfully puerile wonder. Memories of a pet chameleon, a banquet with the emperor, the descent

of winged termites, a hideaway high in an avocado tree and the cry of hyenas outside the bedroom window on Christmas Eve are apt to remind adult readers of their own less exotic youthful discoveries and stoke the imaginations of older children and young adults. Such precision in voice earned Bascom the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference Bakeless Prize, and his smartly naïf à ve observations grow more sophisticated as the country succumbs to political unrest in the 1970s and missionary life becomes uncertain. Nostalgic but not overwrought, Bascom's memoir is accented with casual family snapshots like ribbons on the gift of a gently captured place in time. (June)

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This is a neat little book about a young boy growing up as a missionary kid in Ethiopia. It is an interesting read, and well written. Reading the book, I felt my pulse slow, and the day meander by, and felt a little of what the author must have felt as a boy in that situation. The book does a good job of taking the reader to that place. Anyone wishing to experience the life of a missionary kid, or perhaps that of the child of a foreign relief worker, may enjoy this book.

This is a very interesting narration about the adventures and difficulties faced by a missionary family serving in Ethiopia during the reign of Haile Selassie as told by the youngest son. The experience is

enriched by Bascom's reflections looking back as an adult years later. The events are vividly described and the reflections are spiritually serious. Easy to read and well worth it.

This memoir begins when the writer @ age 3 goes to Ethiopia with his missionary parents (his father is also a physician) and 2 brothers. Mr. Bascom is a very good writer, and has an uncanny ability to recall his years spent in Ethiopia. I suggest that his story would have wide appeal to readers, and highly recommend it.

Received promptly and condition promised.

This book is beautifully written from the perspective of a young boy who has recently moved from Kansas to Ethiopia with his parents, who are missionaries. Not only do you get a glimpse into the country and the culture of the people, but also how isolated he was from that culture. A wonderful book and am so glad to have read it.

Contrary to what other reviewers read in this book, I found it to be less an account of missionary experience (adequately written or not) than an account of being a very small child who was placed in a constant state of insecurity and anxiety by his parents. This was their choice of life, but they subjected their very young children to the consequences of their adult choices. That they placed their children in such constant disruption and uncertainty seems to me to be irresponsible. It seemed to me that they were very neglectful, selfish and even emotionally abusive. Does having a "calling" or a cause give permission to treat one's children the way that these parents did? The focus of this book was on this little boy's impressions of family, of his own emotional state and a child's perspective of some experiences. As a narrow view of political events or of missionary life affected that child's life, they were included, but it is mainly a story of a neglected, lonely and frightened child kept in persistent anxiety about matters of safety, security and family relationships. I don't know how representative this kind of neglect of missionary children is of missionary life in Africa or anywhere else, or whether it was unique to these two parents, but I found myself annoyed with these parents through much of this reading. It was astonishing to remember that for much of the time written about, this little boy was 3-4-5 years old being sent away to boarding school far away from his parents.

I agree with the positive reviews for this book. While I doubt the 3 and 4 year old Tim was quite a

precocious as he portrayed himself, I trust his impressions of landing in Ethiopia and experiencing the physical beauty and cultural strangeness of his and his family's thrust into this fascinating culture. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1972 to 1974 and spent time visiting the local American Mission compound in Metu, getting to know the missionary families some of whose children were home schooled and some who were sent to Addis to boarding school. One of the little boys had a pet chameleon! I was immersed in the culture because I was a teacher in the local public school and got to know Ethiopian children and teachers very well. I lived in the town and dealt with the day to day culture challenges. I had to learn Amharinya, just to survive. It was a tough two years but I love almost every part of the experience. There was tension. Teachers doing their two years required service were suspicious of Peace Corps teachers, a few assuming we were CIA spies. There were Marxists. There were student strikes. Tim's book brings back so many memories: the long beautiful yet frightening bus trips along the escarpments, the constant vigilance to not get sick, the small moments (weaver birds! baboons, Colobus monkeys watching the basketball games, children making soccer balls out of old stockings.) I think the missionary families were brave. Yes, their children had challenges our little neighbor kids don't have, but they did so much good with their medical mission and education of locals in their dresser schools. And they cared very much about their own children, just as my neighbors care about theirs. Ethiopia is a beautiful and fascinating country. Thank you, Tim, for your wonderful story.

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