

SummerWild relives the 1950s

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I recently had the pleasure of reading Kenneth William Budd's *SummerWild* – the first of four books in Budd's *The Adventures of Buddy Williams* series.

The book is set in a fictionalized Cochin beach on a fictionalized Jackfish Lake (called Pelican Lake in the book) in 1953 and documents the adventures of a child as he spends the summer there. Future books in the series will be devoted to life in the other three seasons. Told from the perspective of 10-year-old Buddy Williams, the book focuses on what is of interest to a 10-year-old child – chokecherry picking, swimming, playing with friends. But through its focus, the book also reveals much about a past that I never knew, and the book's author knew intimately.

In his often breathless, childlike narration, Buddy Williams describes North Battleford life in the early 1950s eloquently – the rarity of cars, the ubiquity of the railroad and the children with parents who had just been lost in the war.

All of these details create a rich picture of an almost idyllic past. Though Buddy and his two friends (who dub themselves the Three Musketeers) do get into trouble, the worst trouble results in nothing more than an injury, a stern talking to or both.

The novel does cover some adult issues, but it does so through the clear-eyed gaze of one too young to be filled with hate. Buddy's reaction to racism that he never directly witnesses in the course of the book is essentially confusion, and he timidly, innocently, endorses multiculturalism: "It came to me that the world was a much better place because of all the different kinds of people in it. It made living more interesting and exciting."

The book of course also does a good job of describing day-to-day life in a bygone era. To the intended audience of his book (it is marketed as young adult fiction, but could just as easily be read by adults wanting to reminisce), the '50s are almost alien – an era when the electrical grid was less spread out than a modern Wi-Fi network. But they are not so far off as to be un-relatable.

Saskatchewan families still flock to the lakes in droves in the summer, children still learn to hunt and to fish, and have (hopefully) still experienced a few days of life without the many electronic gadgets that clutter our lives.

The book paints the picture of life in the '50s through many small details; Buddy's cabin at the lake does not have running water, and the village of Cochin has only a single store. Buddy's grandmother sometimes seems to work almost constantly – cooking, baking, boiling water, making lunches for Buddy – signs of a time when labour-saving devices were fewer. One detail that stood out to me was the book's focus on the way objects were recycled – in his adventures, Buddy finds many uses for flour sacks. In today's consumer culture, we are more likely to purchase a net than use a flour sack to catch minnows.

SummerWild comes highly recommended for young and old, and is available for purchase at Cradleberries, but can also be ordered from www.summerwild.ca or from a variety of eBook retailers. The book's website also features study guides for Grades five to nine.

