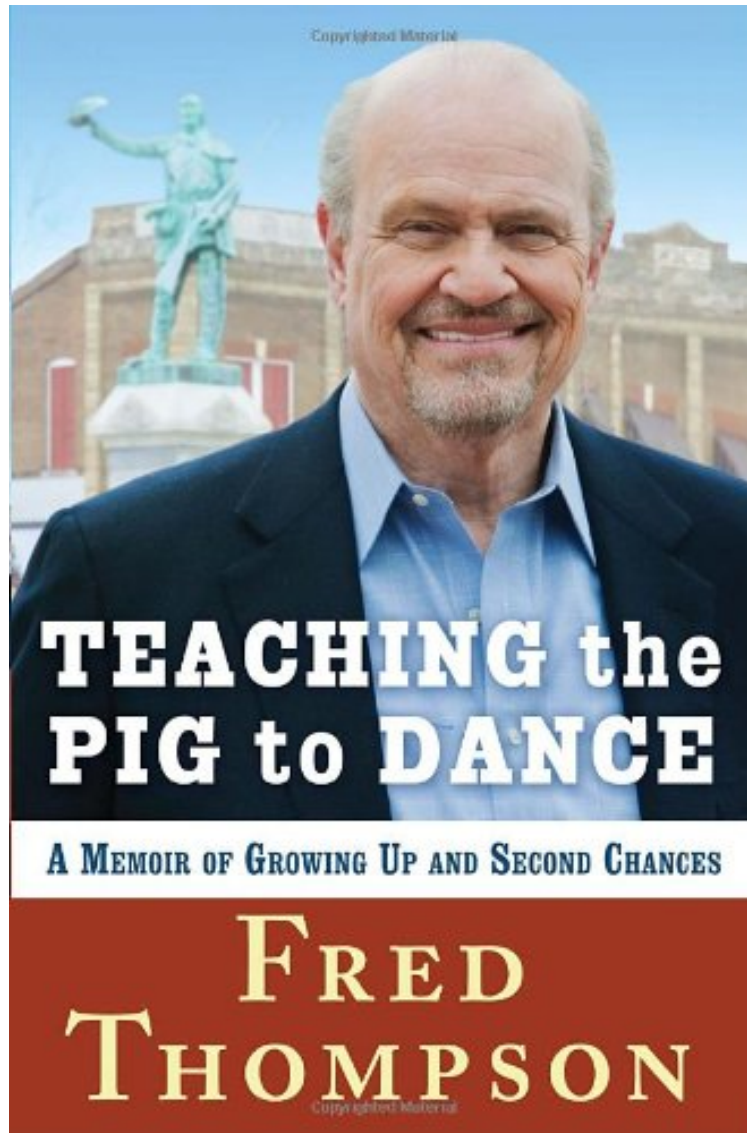


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Teaching the Pig to Dance: A Memoir of Growing Up and Second Chances

Fred Thompson

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#1160553 in Books 2010-05-18 2010-05-18 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.55 x .95 x 5.70l, .88 #File Name: 0307460282272 pages | File size: 38.Mb

Fred Thompson : Teaching the Pig to Dance: A Memoir of Growing Up and Second Chances before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Teaching the Pig to Dance: A Memoir of Growing Up and Second Chances:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A touching "read" from a truly unique person! By PeggyI grew up in Lawrenceburg, as well, and was friends with one of Fred's cousins. Fred was a few years older, but I was around him

at family gatherings (which, if you are from a small town, everyone knows what those are like)! When Fred passed, we lost a truly great man and wonderful human being! I thoroughly enjoyed the book and laughed out loud a lot and shed some tears, too. I know so many people who fit right into his book. His description of life in a small town and the activities we all were a part of, made me feel as if we were sitting around just having a conversation. Fred always had a great sense of humor but could also be a little intimidating with his stature and deep voice. This is a book that I think will appeal to everyone. It's informative, touching, and yet extremely entertaining. I enjoyed the book immensely and have given copies to other friends and family from Lawrenceburg, as well. I think at one time or other, we all felt as if we were "teaching a pig to dance"! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Enjoying ReadBy Sue JI've always liked Fred whether he was a guest on a political talk show, the boss in "Law and Order", or any movie. He just seems like a funny, intelligent, good ol' boy, so when his somewhat abbreviated bio came out a few weeks ago, I latched onto it. Looks like he's exactly as he comes across - honest, perceptive, funny, intelligent, and evidently one hell a handful of kid growing up, who learned life's hard lessons when he became a teenage father while a senior in high school. Won't win any Pulitzer prizes, but still an enjoying read. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Enlightening, refreshingly honestBy Older not WiserI read this in one weekend. I found the honesty refreshing. Simple stories of the past, including those that do not put the author in a good light give credibility to the entire work. This is not an inside baseball analysis of his political life, but rather a trip back to his boyhood, heartwarming stories of growing up and familial relationships (good and bad), and some frank talk of his personal bad decisions. It's like everyone's life but not everyone would put it in print. There is also joyful acknowledgement of all the characters in his past that had a positive influence on his life. It is peppered with enough southern humor to keep you smiling, and even snort your coffee once in a while. I came away with an appreciation for Fred the child, the young man, and the man NOT in the spot light of acting or politics though that is covered very briefly; I suspect another book or two might be covering those issues. He got into Law Order quite by accident (and an unlikely chain of events) through a case he (as a young lawyer) took on out of desperation to do something significant when there wasn't anything significant to do in a small town. He certainly did not have acting aspirations, which I think is unusual in itself these days. Motto: Take chances. Work hard. Good stuff happens, sometimes.

Fred Thompson has enjoyed a remarkable career in Hollywood and politics, but when he sat down to write a memoir about how he got to be the person he is, he discovered that his best stories all seemed to come out of the years he spent growing up in and around his hometown of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. It was a small town but not the smallest after all, it was the county seat and it did have a courthouse, a couple of movie theaters, and its own Davy Crockett statue. For truly small, you had to travel to nearby Summertown, where the regular Sunday dinner was possum and chocolate gravy. But Lawrenceburg is where Fred got to be a kid, get in his share of trouble and scrapes, get to know folks he didn't realize were so colorful at the time but sure does now, get married, have a few kids, become a man, and start his career as a country lawyer (pretty much in that order). And as Fred tells it, getting that law degree was something of a surprise for him, since in school he'd been less than stellar as a scholar. Teaching Latin to someone like me, he says, was like trying to teach a pig to dance. It's a waste of the teacher's time and it irritates the pig. In these reflections, as hilarious as they are honest and warm, Fred touches on the influences family, hometown neighbors and teachers, team sports, jobs, romances, and personal crises that molded his character, his politics, and the way he looks at life today. We get to know the unforgettable characters who congregated at the Blue Ribbon Caf, like the rotund gentleman called Shorty whose claim to fame was his ability to quickly suck in his stomach and cause his pants to fall to the floor. Or Fred's Grandma Thompson, who became an early TV adopter for the sole purpose of watching Wrestling from Hollywood and who once had a gourd removed from her neck and subsequently walked around town with it in a handkerchief showing it to folks. One day Fred and an accomplice placed small explosive Fourth of July cracker balls under the four legs of their teacher's chair. Mrs. Garner sat down and, despite the racket, didn't flinch so much as a muscle but Fred felt a twinge of the one emotion he hated most shame. Fred idolized Coach Staggs from his high school football days, even though he was like Captain Ahab without the humor and didn't like smart alecks, comics, or individualists, which put the young Fred at a disadvantage. More than anyone else from those days though, Fred remembers his mom and dad, who taught him that kids are shaped most of all by the love and support they can take for granted. Teaching the Pig to Dance will delight everyone who admires Fred Thompson for his contributions to politics or for his work in movies and on TV, along with all those who just love to hear rollicking but unforgettable stories about growing up in a place where, as one of the local old timers put it, We weren't big enough to have a town drunk, so a few of us had to take turns.

About the Author FRED THOMPSON served eight years as a United States Senator from Tennessee, and has remained active in foreign policy, fiscal and judicial affairs since his retirement from the Senate in 2003. In 2008 he sought the Republican nomination for President of the United States. First elected to the United States Senate in 1994, he served as Chairman of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, as well as a member of the Finance Committee and the Select Committee on Intelligence. Earlier in his career Thompson served as an Assistant United States Attorney in

Tennessee, and in 1973 he served as Minority Counsel to the Senate Watergate Committee. Since his first on-screen appearance in 1985 Senator Thompson has appeared in numerous movies, including *Die Hard II*, *Days of Thunder* and *The Hunt for Red October*; he will appear in *Walt Disney Pictures Secretariat*, set for release in October 2010. He is also well known for his portrayal of New York District Attorney Arthur Branch on the Emmy Award-winning NBC series *Law Order*. He currently hosts *The Fred Thompson Show*, a daily radio talk show produced by Westwood One. He resides in McLean, Virginia with his wife, Jeri, and daughter, Hayden and son, Sammy. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

My Hometown
In the part of the country where I come from, most people are proud of their hometown. Folks in Linden, Tennessee, are a good example of that. Situated in rural country in Middle Tennessee, about fifty-seven miles from where I grew up, Linden had about a thousand residents. One day during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the coffee drinkers at the drugstore on the town square noticed out the window that one of the local good old boys had his pickup truck loaded with what appeared to be his worldly possessions. As he walked into the drugstore to buy supplies, one of the coffee-drinking busybodies said to him: Lem, looks like youre moving out. Whats up? Aint you boys heard about the missile crisis? Lem replied. The fellow answered, Yeah, but what makes you think theyre gonna bomb Linden? Lem said, Its the county seat, aint it?... Well, Lawrenceburg is a county seat, too. This meant that Lawrenceburg had a courthouse with a square. Every courthouse in the state was located to be not more than a half days horse ride from any part of the county. It also meant that Lawrenceburg was the location of the county fair. As the center of county culture, it had a movie theater. And it had an organized Little League. In short, growing up in the county seat was pretty much a privileged situation. Like thousands of little towns across America, it was populated mostly by folks who had grown up on the farm and come to town to enjoy the fruits of a better life. Usually having little in the way of a formal education, a mans reputation for hard work and keeping his word were his most valuable assets. Thats the way it was with my people and just about everybody they knew. Its not that our town didnt have its share of scalawags. As one old-timer put it, We werent big enough to have a town drunk, so a few of us had to take turns. What we did have for sure was more than our share of characters, used-car lots, and churches, all of which were an important part of my years growing up. Some time ago I decided to write my story a story that began in Lawrenceburg. You know, the obligatory autobiography, written by anyone with the necessary fifteen minutes of fame or success. It would be about how I left Lawrenceburg and, over the years, had some very interesting adventures. There were the early days when I was a federal prosecutor. Then there would be a part about my role as counsel for the Watergate committee, and my part in revealing the taping system in the Nixon White House. Then, of course, I would relate some of my experiences in the movie business as well as on the TV show *Law Order*. And there would be the eight years I spent in the U.S. Senate (which made me long for the realism and sincerity of Hollywood). Naturally, I would also talk about my presidential campaign (described by one of my comedian friends as probably the most stressful three weeks of my life). Finally, there would be the concluding chapter that we are all too familiar with, wherein I would give my instructions to a waiting America as to what must be done to meet the challenges of our time. Its amazing how brilliant and insightful a fellow becomes when he leaves elective office and cant do a thing about all those problems. I even had a title for that book picked out: *Why Ive Had Such a Hard Time Keeping a Job*. In all seriousness, that book I had in mind was going to be more than just old, warmed-over war stories. I was going to write about opportunities presenting themselves and why I took some and not others. Theres a lot to be said for seizing the moment, and I thought a book about the remarkable interconnectedness of the experiences Ive had how a decision I made has so often seemed to lead inexorably to consequences and opportunities that I never foresaw might be somewhat instructive. Well, this is not that book. As I got into the process, I discovered that what I was writing about was what happened before I left Lawrenceburg, not after I left. The thought of those times didnt necessarily make me nostalgic, but they did make me feel good. I was revisiting and laughing with some of the most interesting characters and funniest people youd ever hope to meet, not the least of whom was my own dad. The fact is that the people I knew and the experiences I had in that little town formed the prism through which I have viewed the world, and they shaped the way I have dealt with events throughout my life. Those growing-up years in Lawrenceburg left me with a particular take on life. A saying I often heard sort of typifies it. Usually said with a smile, it is Aint nobody gonna get out of this old world alive anyway, son, often said to put things into perspective when times were getting rough. And, perhaps not surprisingly, I heard sayings like that more than a couple of times from more than a few people. From the girl I married as a teenager and her family, to the teachers, coaches, preachers, and most of all my mom and dad, they encouraged and tolerated this young neer-do-well kid with no apparent prospects. They cajoled me, inspired me, and shepherded me from childhood to manhood. It was not an easy trip for any of us, but by the time I left Lawrenceburg, I had learned some valuable lessons and had the confidence to take on the world. (Of course, the world had the confidence to take on me, too, but thats another story.) Theres another old saying that comes to mind: Life is a comedy for those who think and a tragedy for those who feel. I can add to that. Where I come from, tragedy and comedy were often served at the same table. But the lessons that grew out of those experiences were grounded in the kind of commonsense view of life and living that today is, unfortunately, all too uncommon. So I decided to write about what I wanted to write about. Stories about growing up in every sense of the word. Stories about Lawrenceburg. Its about time Lawrenceburg had the recognition. After all, it is the county seat. The Tree the Acorn Fell From I suppose everyone

remembers where they were when they realized they were not going to be the leader of the free world. I know I do. It was on January 19, 2008, in the back of a bus rolling down a road just outside of Charleston, South Carolina, when early exit-poll results started coming in from the South Carolina presidential primary. I had edged out McCain in Iowa and come in ahead of Romney and Giuliani in South Carolina. The bad news is I came in third in both places. Not good enough. In presidential primary politics, many are called but few are chosen. I wasn't, and it was time to hang it up. I had walked through many doors of opportunity in my life and was used to finding something good on the other side. In fact, for me the 2008 primary season was officially the first time in my life I had proven (in a most public way) that I couldn't accomplish something I had set out to do. It was a rather humbling experience. It occurred to me that, to paraphrase one of Churchill's comments, perhaps I had more to be humble about than I had realized. It also occurred to me that this was a pretty doggone expensive way to achieve a little humility. Maybe I needed to be reminded of what an old-timer told me years ago after I'd had some success: Just remember, son, the turnout at your funeral is still going to depend a hell of a lot on the weather. Yeah, yeah, I accepted all that, but for some reason the immortal words of Dick Tuck seemed more appropriate. Tuck was a Democratic operative famous before and during Watergate as a political prankster. When President Nixon adopted the campaign slogan Nixon's the One, Tuck had several women boisterously show up at a Nixon rally in pregnancy costumes, waving signs saying Nixon's the One. Tuck finally ran for office himself for the state senate in California. On Election Night, when it became obvious he was receiving a drubbing, he went before his supporters and the media and said, The people have spoken . . . the bastards. By the morning of January 20, I had other things to be thinking about. By then, I was at the bedside of my mother at Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville. At eighty-seven, she was enduring her latest and most severe bout of pneumonia, compounded by several other ailments. She did not look good at all. In fact, the doctor and the head nurse privately talked to me in very somber tones, uttering We've done all that we can do type comments. Of course, they didn't take into account the fact that Mrs. Ruth was tough as a pine knot. She hated hospitals with an extraordinary passion and was totally exhausted from the constant visits by hospital personnel. For the next twenty-four hours, I camped outside her room in a chair and made the medical staff justify their admission before I would let them in. She got some rest and soon was improving, just as she had many times before. She and I have concluded that most people who die in hospitals flatline from aggravation and lack of sleep. Literally, almost overnight, I had gone from the most public, intrusive, self-centered existence known to man to the exact opposite the quiet of my mother's room late at night. It was a quick journey from manufactured reality to reality. I smiled as I remembered her telling me when I was a kid: Freddie, you can be anything you want to be, but please just don't be a lawyer or a politician. Over the years I think she changed her mind about my becoming a lawyer, but I don't think she ever quite fully bought into the politician pa...