



## To Serve Them All My Days

*R.F. Delderfield*

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Miner's son David Powlett-Jones returns from the carnage of the Western Front in 1918, shell-shocked and bitterly hardened by the violence of war. He begins life again as a master at a remote Devon school, controlling the destiny of boys barely his junior. As the years pass David becomes a teacher of rare talent, begins to find peace, and is able to adjust to the changes which are overwhelming society. But soon he will have to face up to the prospect of another terrible war.

## To Serve Them All My Days Details

Date : Published 1972 by Hodder and Stoughton

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Author : R.F. Delderfield

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## **From Reader Review To Serve Them All My Days for online ebook**

### **Trisha says**

A British boys' boarding school, in the period between the two world wars provides the setting for this lengthy novel about a shell shocked young man who takes on a temporary job as a teacher and ends up spending the next 22 years gradually learning to love everything about his life as a school master, housemaster and eventually the headmaster. For those of us Anglophiles who loved Hogwarts School of Wizardy, Bamfylde is the next best thing and actually goes a long ways to helping us understand the British residential school system that provides part of the framework for the Harry Potter books. While the plot and the characterizations were a little thin in places what kept me reading was the setting and time period. Even though I didn't live through that era and certainly never attended a boys' boarding school the book left me feeling nostalgic for an England that probably only exists in books, and a way of life where no matter what happens the best way to approach it is to have a cup of tea first.

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### **Whitney says**

Very rarely do I find a book that captures so much of my mind that I read every word. This was one of those books! It embraced a heart for teaching, a passion for history, a draw to love, and a strength through hardship all in a landscape of a prep school in England. Looking at life between the two wars that both engulfed the world, from the perspective of a small, secluded, and hidden piece of the earth was one of the most interesting perspectives I have been immersed in! It challenged my mind and opened my heart! It was an excellent read!

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### **C Mac says**

hello all

friend told me to try this book  
thought to myself

my grandparents escaped the slums  
of Victorian London  
to live in Canada

don't want to read book about training  
the English upper class

grabbed hold of me  
when it ended  
it was as if a small part of the world died

another books as ships story

ship that takes you away to another  
time and place  
took me to another time another place

yours truly  
mac

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### **Laura says**

*From BBC Radio 4 Extra:  
Adaptation of RF Delderfield's classic drama set between the two world wars.*

SPLENDID!! I just mooched another book by this author.

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### **Dorcas says**

3 1/2 Stars

I think I deserve one of those shiny silver star stickers on my forehead for getting through all 678 pages! My paperback was literally falling apart in my hands and required frequent sticky tape first aid as I read.

As my friends know, I love chunky sagas and epics but I'll be honest with you. You could EASILY chop 200 pages off this without affecting the story one iota.

**IN A NUTSHELL:** A shell shock soldier ( WW1) is discharged from a lengthy hospital stay and is encouraged to take a post at a boys boarding school by his neurologist. What follows is 20 years as a teacher and mentor and how one school gave a shell of a man a new lease on life and reason to live.

The first half was 5 stars for me but I wish his first wife could have held up a bit longer (I'm not spoiling it, its in the description and come on, it covers 20 years so nothing is permanent) I really liked her a lot and wished things could have been different. His future love interests I didn't care for so much.

One character is very into politics and my eyes start glazing over when you mention Tories and liberals, so you can imagine I found these bits hard going. The school subjects/methods also got a little tedious after a while but it is a book about a boarding school so what did I expect, right? For anyone in the education field this book would be fascinating.

I really loved the stories about the individual boys and their escapades. Their nicknames were entertaining as well. I come from a family where no one uses anyone's real names and we have nicknames for everyone else we know too (some know it and most don't!) so I could relate to this. Some nicknames:

Matron. Heavy, full busted and highly corseted: MA FENDER  
Student with one missing \*ahem\* appendage: LACKANACKER  
Teacher with one toe missing and a rolling gait: TUMBLER  
Teacher with comaraderie classroom discussions: POW-WOW  
The list goes on and on....

The writing itself is very readable and the characters well portrayed and individualistic. It's a good story and worth reading.  
But I'm glad I'm done. :)

#### CONTENT:

SEX: Fade to black  
VIOLENCE: None  
PROFANITY: Moderate. D, B, H

#### MY RATING: PG 13

By the way, I started watching the BBC series 'To Serve Them All My Days' on youtube and have enjoyed it very much! The characters seem well portrayed and it sticks quite closely to the book. Well done!

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#### **Leila says**

This book was first published in England in 1972 and is probably the most well known of R.F.Delderfield's novels. It is over 600 pages in length and immensely readable. It follows the life of miner's son David Powlett-Jones from the point where he returns from the carnage of world war 1 in 1918 severely shell-shocked and devastated by the horrifying conditions of life in the trenches and the dreadful toll of deaths. He starts life again as a schoolmaster at a small public school in Devon in charge of boys, the eldest of whom are not that much younger than he is. The novel follows him through the years of his life spent there. There is both sadness and joy as in most lives as he learns to adjust and turn into a very talented history teacher and a valued member of staff. I found this book to be totally absorbing and it gripped me throughout. Though there is much descriptive background it never bores. The novel has a real emotional poignancy that touched me deeply. The contrasting characters are beautifully drawn and are written with great depth. It is a very moving book and a fascinating read! I confess I did get a little bogged down in parts where the story went into the politics of the time, but that is a personal opinion only. This is one of the best books I have read in a long time.

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#### **Julia Reed says**

I am a sucker for a good period novel, I admit it. And R.F. Delderfield has always scratched that niche for me nicely. On a recent beach trip I decided to revisit "To Serve Them All My Days", one of my very favorite Delderfield novels. It's the story of a WWI veteran, just returned from the front with a severe case of PTSD.

The prescribed cure is a stint in an enclosed community focused on work and camaraderie: in this case, an English public school. I don't know that in modern times we would put a soldier suffering from shell shock in charge of a class of teenagers, but maybe we should consider it. David Powlett-Jones, the aforementioned soldier, finds therapy and healing guiding generations of young Englishmen through the inter-war years. As a history teacher, he's well placed to teach them about the waste of war, but he also brings the past's good lessons alive to them. He makes friends, he even falls in love, and time and again, it's the school and the pupils that restore his badly shredded faith in people. Patriotic in a good way, and full of lessons about decency and the true purpose of education, *To Serve Them All My Days* is a wonderful story that I think still bears relevant truth in our own war weary times.

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### **DiNovia says**

I sometimes still wake up in the morning and look forward to reading more about P.J. and Bamfylde. The book could have gone on another thousand pages as far as I'm concerned and I would have been riveted. Very English. A great tutorial on the British Boys' School and how that effects their society.

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### **Arthur says**

A remarkable novel. A clear evocation of an era long gone by; sentimental in the best sense of that word—honest about what matters, valuing it, and figuring out how to live in it. The story takes place between two wars, the first and the second--the big ones, as they are often characterized--and follows the career of a veteran of the first who comes to this lonely outpost for healing. He finds himself here—a teacher, and grounds himself. It is a nostalgic book; at times, a very sad book--I read often with tears in my eyes, especially as I neared the end.

It is also a thoughtful reflection on education, the healing power of relationships, and the purpose of life.

Sometimes as I wend my way to the end of a book, I slow down; I don't want it to end--not because I'm afraid of how it will end but because I like "living" there and want to stay. This is one of those books.

I am grateful to the student who gave it to me; it grounded me as well.

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### **Suzanne says**

This is a book that must be reviewed. I mustn't have been reviewing then. I will remedy this asap. I loved this book. Then I bought it after giving away my second hand copy. This is a book to hold onto. One of the kids Headmaster's enjoyed it too, I raved about it. Glad my dad passed it onto me :)

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### **Chrisl says**

PBS version one of few books that I'd rather re-see than re-read

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To\\_Serv...](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_Serv...)

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### **Rebecca Huston says**

A beautiful novel set in a boarding school between the World Wars. Lt. David Powlett-Jones arrives in the countryside, suffering shell-shock and looking to find a way back into the land of the living. Along the way, he finds love, friendship, hope, and tragedy. Terrific novel, made into a great BBC miniseries.

For the longer review, please go here:

[http://www.epinions.com/content\\_12100...](http://www.epinions.com/content_12100...)

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### **Elizabeth says**

The television mini-series is even better, because Andrew Davies is a god of page-to-screen adaptation.

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### **Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says**

I really enjoyed this (the subject of a Masterpiece Theatre back in the early 80s) story of an English schoolmaster at a country "public school" from 1918-1940.

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### **Robert says**

FANTASTIC. Far superior to Mr Chips, It works on many levels - as a teacher, student story, as an anti-war novel, as an insight into an overshadowed period of British History and as a sprawling, epic novel.

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### **Wally says**

Read this last year along with Delderfield's trilogy A Horseman Riding By, now he is one of my favourite authors.

Behind all the stories is the larger theme of the beautiful Western Civilisation as it manifested itself in country life in Wales and Southwest England before the Great War and how the tremendous loss of life and morals impacted on that previously sheltered world.

As a Jew I notice that RFD includes at least one, usually of foreign origin, Jewish character in each of his books and treats each with understanding and empathy.

The BBC production is nice, but the book is a real classic.

When I went to high school in the States in the 70's this wasn't on the menu, I suppose because it's British, was published too recently, and/or the Judeo-Christian morality behind the stories was out of line with the 60's and 70's anything goes preferences of academic staff at the time.

I would recommend this book to any young person who wants to enjoy a romantic and heart-warming story

and at the same time learn something about the changes after world war I which have made the UK and the Western World what it is today.  
rightwally^at^gmaidohtcohm.

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### **Linda says**

DNF. Too much British slang for this California girl.

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### **Carolyn says**

I read all of this series years ago and loved them; I learned more history from this series than in any classroom and it made more sense too! The changes wrought upon England by WW I were earth-shaking; all of society was forever changed, as were those who were involved in the actual combat and serving at home. Glad to know they're still in print and being read!!

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### **Melanie says**

I simply wallowed in this book almost smelling the lavender polish on the wood of the school. I was taught by men who were probably the pupils in this sort of school. To them your own achievement and sense of self worth was more important than exam results that the current age is obsessed with. The boys in the book radiated decency and honesty deep down. There were clear boundaries of good conduct and morals which carried the characters in good stead throughout life.

The battered shellshocked WWI boy/man who arrives is slowly healed by the school and its Headmaster. His faith in mankind is restored by the steadiness of the school's atmosphere and routine. Gradually he is able to form relationships again and marries. The book takes him through crises and out the other side right through to being able to cope with seeing his own pupils getting involved in WWII and paying the ultimate price. He recognises the necessity of the war for the survival of Great Britain and is able to feel a pride in their sacrifice as well as the futility in the battle he fought in WWI.

The book as a whole takes world events and shows how they affected individuals. The individuals then leave a legacy which is up to the next generation to carry on or disregard.

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### **Alan says**

We saw the 1980 Masterpiece Theatre series compliments of Netflix. Then I wanted to read the book. The series followed the storyline almost completely. Reading the book after seeing hours of the characters on the film, made it seem like visiting old friends. Below is from the end flaps of the 1972 first printing of the book (obtained on order from the local library).

"... an England emerging from the horrors and bloodshed of the 1914-18 war into the twenty years of change, upheaval and uneasy peace that ended with the Second World War. [The:] hero is a schoolmaster, David

Powlett-Jones, who survives the dreary carnage of the Western Front to become a teacher at a remote English "public" school, gradually maturing from a shell-shocked veteran scarcely older than his charges into a great headmaster, whose influence touches and changes the lives of hundreds of boys who pass through his care.

"[the author's:] ability to encompass whole generations, to show, in loving detail and with a scrupulous attention to truth, the vast changes in an England moving from the comfortable certainties of the Victorian Age through the tragedies of the Great War, the moral perplexities of the Twenties, the great strikes, the years of the slump and the dole of the hungry Thirties, on into the glorious Forties, in which England atoned for the appeasement and isolation of The Age of Illusion. His sense of history, his loving re-creation of real events, his almost Churchillian understanding of the English character and genius, have led critics to compare him with such great masters of the traditional English novel ...

"Yet there is more here than history, for R. F. Delderfield is above all a master storyteller, whose characters take on lives of their own and exercise such power over our imagination that they become part of ourselves. "... preparing his boys for a life of uncertainty and violent change, teaching that the old English values of honesty, courage and a love of justice are still worthwhile even in the age of Hitler and Stalin."

I would add, the author and the main character have a true heart for the developing character of young boys - even more remarkable given the isolated living situation of a boarding school. The best parts of the story happen when we see grace and mercy extended wisely so that the boys develop true character.

If you would like a relief from the grisly reality of modern media and books, consider this as a 'good read.' I am savoring the last few pages, not wanting the experience to end. Just as a good book should be ...

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