

A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (1901–1991)

Pulitzer Prize Winning Author

“I love Montana. She is home to me. She is my point of outlook on the universe. I have known her for a long time, and I have fished her streams and hunted her fields and ridden her trails and rejoiced in her majesty.”

A.B. Guthrie, Jr., *Big Sky, Fair Land*.

Alfred Bertrum (Bud) Guthrie, Jr. was born January 13, 1901, in Bedford, Indiana. At six months of age he moved with his parents to Montana. The family settled near Choteau and Bud grew up exploring the wild, big, and beautiful country along the Rocky Mountain Front. After high school he earned his bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Montana in 1923.

In 1926 Guthrie became a cub reporter for the *Lexington Leader* in Kentucky. He worked his way through the ranks to become the executive editor. In 1931 he married his childhood sweetheart from Choteau, Harriet Larson. They had two children, Bert and Helen.

While at the *Leader* Guthrie received the prestigious Nieman Fellowship to Harvard University, which provided him with the opportunity to seriously pursue his writing career. It was during this time he completed his first novel, *The Big Sky*. Published in 1947 it was one of the first novels to portray the authentic harshness and grandeur of the Old West. It received national acclaim and became a giant bestseller.

He followed with the equally successful novel, *The Way West*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1950. Between 1953 and 1955 he wrote the screenplays for the films *Shane* and *The Kentuckian*.

In 1956 Guthrie and his family returned to his beloved Montana, where he was able to pursue his writing career fulltime. He and his wife divorced in 1956. Guthrie met Carol Bischman Luthin in Missoula, and they married in 1969. Guthrie adopted her two children – Amy and Herbert William Luthin.

Guthrie published several other historical novels including *These Thousand Hills*, 1956; *Arfive*, which won the 1970 Western Heritage Wrangler Award; *The Last Valley*, 1975; and *Fair Land, Fair Land*, 1982. He wrote numerous short stories and essays and tried his hand at mystery novels. His non-fiction writings include *The Blue Hen's Chick: An Autobiography*, 1965; *Big Sky, Fair Land: The Environmental Essays of A.B. Guthrie, Jr.*, 1989; *Images from the Great West*, 1990; and his final book, *A Field Guide to Writing Fiction*, was published in 1991.

He received an honorary doctorate in literature from the University of Montana in 1948, and the UM's Distinguished Alumni Award in 1984.

Guthrie became an outspoken advocate for the preservation of Montana's wild lands, focusing his passions in particular on the area along the Rocky Mountain Front.

In describing his craft Guthrie said, “*Writing is not a gift – let's dispose of that myth right now. Writing is damn hard, lonely and painful work, and no one can call himself a master of it.*”

A.B. Guthrie, Jr. died April 26, 1991, at his home facing Ear Mountain on the Rocky Mountain Front, near Choteau.

