Book Review on Douglas Thayer's *Hooligan*

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My initial reaction to this book was an extremely critical one. On the very first page, the death of a classmate is presented in a way that seems almost gratuitous, coming and going without explanation or any real connection to what comes before or after. Occasionally descriptions or ideas are repeated in the book almost word for word, giving the impression that you have read something before (because you have), and Thayer’s writing style first struck me as syntactically difficult. However, I soon found myself appreciating his style, and by the time I was halfway through I would have recommended the book without hesitation.

*Hooligan* is written as a memoir of Thayer’s youth, growing up in Provo during the Depression and Second World War. As the novel develops, I
found that it was not just the author’s story, but that of a town, a time, and a way of life. The book has no real plot, roughly following the progression of years in Thayer’s life. Rather, it paints a wonderfully vivid portrait through detailed descriptions of everyday events, all presented from the perspective and with the practical understanding of a young boy. Along that same idea, I came to appreciate the fact that seemingly important life events, such as his parents’ divorce, were not dealt with on any deep or profound level. While tragedy does shape an individual, everyone has to live life from one day to the next, and for me that aspect made the writing come alive more than anything else. Having now read the book two times through, I feel as though I remember
Thayer’s childhood better than my own.

Before first opening the book, my primary qualm was the responsibility that I felt Thayer assumed for himself by adding “A Mormon Boyhood” to the title of his book. To me, that indicates that something should be said from a Mormon perspective to make the fact worth mentioning. In that qualm I feel at least partially vindicated, as little in the book seems remarkable to a Mormon childhood. However, it seemed the book was not about saying something so much as sharing something, and in that I believe that Thayer could not have done a better job.