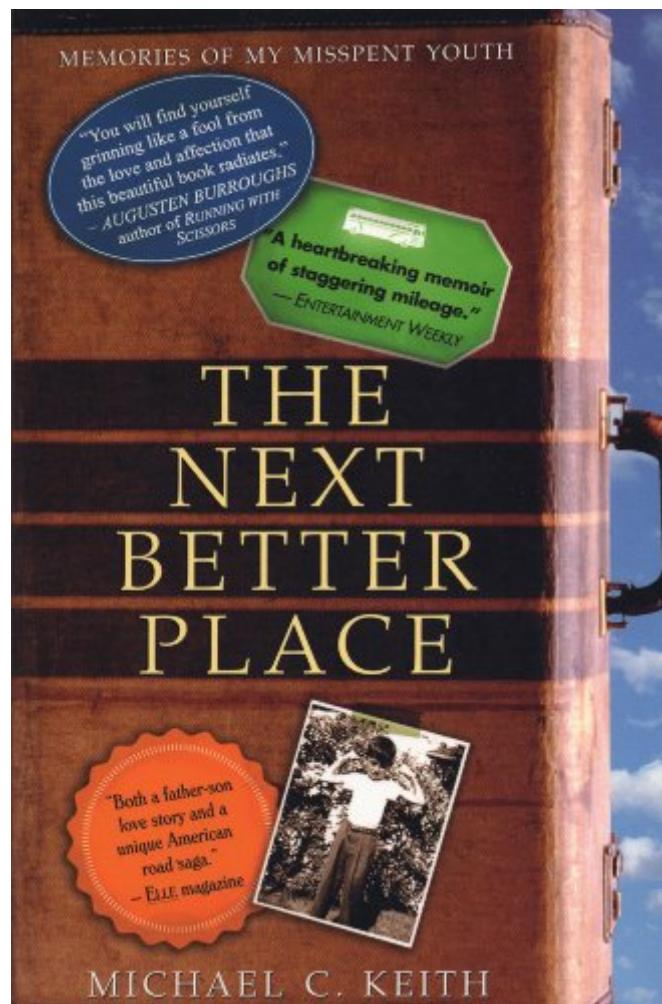


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# The Next Better Place: Memories Of My Misspent Youth



## **Synopsis**

In 1959, at the age of eleven, Michael Keith left a relatively stable life with his mother and sisters in Albany, New York, and surreptitiously set off for California with his irresponsible alcoholic father. For the rest of Michael's childhood, the two crisscrossed America, perpetually en route to someplace else. His memoir, told in the fresh, funny, world-wise voice of the young boy he once was, describes their bizarre encounters hitchhiking the nation's highways. In the rundown rooming houses and homeless missions where they hole up as Michael's father works odd jobs to make enough money for them to move on, or in the AA meetings they attend in every city for a decent doughnut, we glimpse a different America. Pushed onward by Michael's unceasing thirst for new adventures and his father's dreams of the next better place, the careworn twosome live far outside convention. But despite their peculiar, often dysfunctional life, there is real love between this father and son, and they share the glorious freedom of the peripatetic life. That such happiness exists in a lonely marginal universe doesn't overshadow the fact that a Greyhound bus is the closest Michael comes to experiencing the idea of home. **THE NEXT BETTER PLACE** explores the fine line between wanderlust and compulsion, between running away and arriving, and leaves us with the understanding that the journey is often more powerful than the destination.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

Imagine a young boy and his estranged father on the road traveling across the United States on their way to California. Imagine also, the boy and his father having one adventure after another and along the way, the boy and his father both learn something about themselves and each other. Could anything be more romantic in a post World War II, Kerouac world? However, in Michael C. Keith's brilliant and moving memoirs, *The Next Better Place: Memories of my Misspent Youth*, a coming-of-age story set in the 1950s, the story is much more complex and poignant. Keith takes readers on an amazing and memorable journey as father and son leave Albany, New York on their way to California. Their journey is fraught with one misadventure after another as they travel by bus and hitchhike across America in the 1950s. Half Kerouac and half Stephen King's "Stand by Me" • this coming-of-age story is just as much a story about a father and his son having the chance to spend some quality time together as it is about the son's valuable life lessons he learns on the road. Along the way, the narrator and his father meet an interesting and colorful assortment of individuals who pose all sorts of problems and windfalls. I love the way Keith wove these characters into the story and how each one's back story added to the overall story of Keith and his father. One of the more memorable moments in his book (and there were many!) was when they were picked up hitchhiking by a couple and their kids who were on their way to join a carnival. Having worked for a carnival myself, when I was the same age as Keith, I got a kick out of this part of the journey and the story.

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