

We Americans love to look at ourselves. How we vote, where we work, what we think about church and school -- studying ourselves is a national pastime. What has been missing in all this self-examination, until now, is a book about the greatest national obsessions of all: the hobbies we pursue, the collections and amateur sports to which we devote so much of our lives. The Banana Sculptor, the Purple Lady, and the All-Night Swimmer chronicles the amazing variety of ways in which we relax, compete with others and ourselves, and indulge some of our richest fantasies. Here are wonderfully warm and witty accounts of Americans as they: attempt to swim all the Great Lakes, often in horrible conditions; quit a job and begin raising sheep to accommodate a newfound passion for spinning; eat at every McDonalds in the nation; carve The Last Supper from wood; cross all the worlds suspension bridges; build huge banana sculptures; roller blade, scull, and bake; and collect marbles, Noahs arks, talking birds, and much more. In these pages youll meet a marvelous array of ordinary people who do unusual things, sometimes to extremes, as they define for themselves worlds of imagination, contest, and excellence. These are people who thrill to the chase and sometimes plain wear themselves out having fun, whether its flying kites as big as a king-size mattress, canoeing in the Canadian wilderness, or meticulously recording the daily details of their everyday existence. In Working, Studs Terkel gave us an unforgettable oral history of the working life of an earlier generation. The Banana Sculptor, the Purple Lady, and the All-Night Swimmer is a history for our own times -- of the passionate pursuits by which so many of us define ourselves and of the universal search for happiness and a sense of fulfillment. Maybe youll find yourself in the forty people profiled here. Maybe youll find a hobby that youll want to make your own. Either way, your life is likely to be enriched, just as the lives of the people you will read about are enriched by the depth of their commitment and the beauty of their accomplishments.

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