



# The Bill from My Father: A Memoir

*Bernard Cooper*

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## **The Bill from My Father: A Memoir** Bernard Cooper

Bernard Cooper's new memoir is searing, soulful, and filled with uncommon psychological nuance and laugh-out-loud humor. Like Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life*, Cooper's account of growing up and coming to terms with a bewildering father is a triumph of contemporary autobiography.

Edward Cooper is a hard man to know. Dour and exuberant by turns, his moods dictate the always uncertain climate of the Cooper household. Balding, octogenarian, and partial to a polyester jumpsuit, Edward Cooper makes an unlikely literary muse. But to his son he looms larger than life, an overwhelming and baffling presence.

As *The Bill from My Father* begins, Bernard and his father find themselves the last remaining members of the family that once included his mother, Lillian, and three older brothers. Now retired and living in a run-down trailer, Edward Cooper had once made a name for himself as a divorce attorney whose cases included "The Case of the Captive Bride" and "The Case of the Baking Newlywed," as they were dubbed by the *Herald Examiner*. An expert at "the dissolution of human relationships," the elder Cooper is slowly succumbing to dementia. As the author attempts, with his father's help, to forge a coherent picture of the Cooper family history, he discovers some peculiar documents involving lawsuits against other family members, and recalls a bill his father once sent him for the total cost of his upbringing, an itemized invoice adding up to 2 million dollars.

Edward's ambivalent regard for his son is the springboard from which this deeply intelligent memoir takes flight. By the time the author receives his inheritance (which includes a message his father taped to the underside of a safe deposit box), and sees the surprising epitaph inscribed on his father's headstone, *The Bill from My Father* has become a penetrating meditation on both monetary and emotional indebtedness, and on the mysterious nature of memory and love.

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