



Rocket Boys

A Memoir

Homer H. Hickman, Jr.

PRAISE FOR
ROCKET BOYS

“COMPELLING ... Rocketry gives Hickam’s story of his teenage years in the 1950’s and early 60’s a unique twist... Fulfillment of a boy’s dreams is what makes *Rocket* soar.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

“A GREAT READ ... *Rocket Boys* is one man’s engaging account of growing up and leaving home, but ... it is much more than that... One closes the book with an immense feeling of satisfaction.”

—*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“[A] NOSTALGIC AND ENTERTAINING MEMOIR.”

—*People*

“*Rocket Boys* ... rewards every mother and teacher who ever told children they could be anything they wanted if they worked hard enough... The memory of a special time remains for Hickam and everyone who ever dreamed of soaring to the stars.”

—*The Orlando Sentinel*

“THOROUGHLY CAPTIVATING.”

—*The Christian Science Monitor*

“A REFRESHINGLY HOPEFUL BOOK about personal triumph and achieving one’s dreams, a book that can be recommended to all... Hickam has written a wonderful story about when kids had to make their own fun with what was at hand. It’s an adult book about remembering childhood.”

—*San Antonio Express-News*

“*Rocket Boys*, while a true story, reads like a well-written novel. It deals with a wide range of issues, including the bittersweet experience of coming of age. It also

provides an intimate look at a dying town where people still allowed kids to dream and helped them make those dreams become reality.”

—*Rocky Mountain News*

“A WONDERFUL READ ... *Rocket Boys* is [a] message of hope and accomplishment.”

—*The Knoxville News-Sentinel*

“As our emotions are stirred and our nostalgia awakened, this wonderful and inspirational story really treats us to an enduring depiction about family, hope and love.

—*Nashville Tennessean*

“UPLIFTING.”

—*BookPage*

“It’s a big story, and Hickam tells it expertly ... a second-to-none tale of hope and self-realization.”

—*Charleston Gazette*

“ENTHRALLING ... Hickam recalls stories ... with vivid detail and historic accuracy. *Rocket Boys* is much more than the story of six boys who wanted to build a better rocket. It’s the story of a young man looking for more from his life than what his dying community will be able to provide.”

—*Huntsville Times (Ala.)*

“Great memoirs must balance the universal and the particular. Too much of the former makes it overly familiar; too much of the latter makes readers ask what the story has to do with them. In his debut, Hickam walks that line beautifully. No matter how jaded readers have become by the onslaught of memoirs, none will want to miss the fantastic voyage of BCMA, *Auk* and *Coalwood*.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“ABSORBING.”

—*Booklist*

“So skillful and moving is the prose that he would surely have won his way free of Appalachia using a gift for words if an affinity for science had not opened the door first. Hickam portrays people who were important to his life ... [and] draws these and other figures with a deft hand that many authors never achieve. The book also offers something unusual these days: enthusiasm and hope that almost seem to come from a different civilization than our own.”

—*The San Diego Union-Tribune*

“Hickam writes with the wisdom of an adult embracing boyhood perceptions ... it’s a small story about big dreams and blasting into new frontiers.”

—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“DIFFICULT TO PUT DOWN ... a poignant reminder of an extinct town. Hickam has a marvelous grasp of language, especially in his descriptions. Far from it being overly scientific, everyone should identify with something in these memoirs.”

—*Louisville Eccentric Observer*

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A M e m o i r

Homer H. Hickman, Jr.



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*To Mom and Dad
And the people of Coalwood*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE ROCKET BOYS of the Big Creek Missile Agency and their lives and times were real, but it should be mentioned that I have used a certain author's license in telling their story. While I have used the actual names for each of the boys and my parents and most of the people in this book, I have used pseudonyms for others and also sometimes combined two or more people into one when I felt it necessary for clarification and simplification. I have also taken certain liberties in the telling of the story, particularly having to do with the precise sequence of events and who may have said what to whom. Nevertheless, my intention in allowing this narrative to stray from strict nonfiction was always to illuminate more brightly the truth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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—Homer H. Hickam, Jr.
May 1998