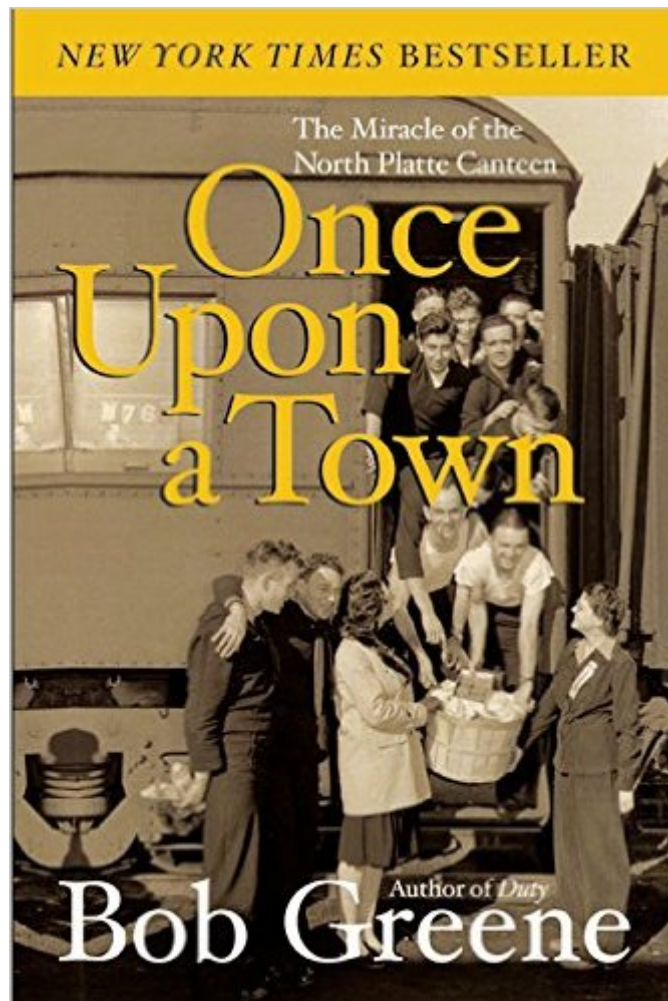


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# Once Upon A Town: The Miracle Of The North Platte Canteen



## Synopsis

In search of "the best America there ever was," bestselling author and award-winning journalist Bob Greene finds it in a small Nebraska town few people pass through today—a town where Greene discovers the echoes of the most touching love story imaginable: a love story between a country and its sons. During World War II, American soldiers from every city and walk of life rolled through North Platte, Nebraska, on troop trains en route to their ultimate destinations in Europe and the Pacific. The tiny town, wanting to offer the servicemen warmth and support, transformed its modest railroad depot into the North Platte Canteen. Every day of the year, every day of the war, the Canteen—staffed and funded entirely by local volunteers—was open from five a.m. until the last troop train of the day pulled away after midnight. Astonishingly, this remote plains community of only 12,000 people provided welcoming words, friendship, and baskets of food and treats to more than six million GIs by the time the war ended. In this poignant and heartwarming eyewitness history, based on interviews with North Platte residents and the soldiers who once passed through, Bob Greene tells a classic, lost-in-the-mists-of-time American story of a grateful country honoring its brave and dedicated sons.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Once Upon a Town" is a book that badly needed to be written. My parents who both served in World War II, years ago, told me the story about the North Platte Canteen. This canteen, organized in a little town in Nebraska, made a point of serving food and drink at no charge to every serviceman and servicewoman who passed through town on troop trains during World War II

(1941-1945). Soldiers and sailors all over the country spoke in awe about the wonderful food and treatment they got from the townspeople of North Platte, Nebraska. Many soldiers struck up penpal correspondence with townspeople they met. A number of women in the North Platte area ended up marrying soldiers when they returned from the war. Bob Greene takes a "Studs Terkel approach" to this subject and much of the book consists of narratives of older people who were present at the time. One thing that really stands out is the unbelievable effort that the people in North Platte (and surrounding areas) made to run the canteen. Only a few thousand people lived in the area. Yet, millions of soldiers passed through the town. Nevertheless, every soldier was served food and drink. Many people contributed their ration coupons, personal savings, and a huge amount of unpaid labor to see that the canteen was always running. These people will forever remain in the hearts of the soldiers and sailors who received their warm hospitality. Greene also relates the changes that have come to North Platte since the war. Sadly, many have not been for the good. A town that used to see 32 passenger trains a day pass through it, now sees none at all. The railroad station and area where the canteen operated was torn down by the Union Pacific Railroad in 1973.

From "Be True to Your School" to "Chevrolet Summers, Dairy Queen Dreams" to this, his most recent ode to America, Bob Greene's topics never fail to appeal to me. In "Once Upon a Town", Greene visits the now-bypassed town of North Platte, Nebraska to write about the North Platte Canteen, operated from 1941-45 by volunteers who staffed and stocked the train station to offer food and comfort to American soldiers passing through on the troop trains. Greene writes of an amazing series of events, started by a letter to the local newspaper asking why the townspeople could not use the short stop of the troop trains in North Platte to cheer the soldiers up and show support for what they were doing. Within days, women from all over the state arrived with provisions to make sandwiches, and with cakes, cookies, magazines, playing cards, coffee, fruit and cigarettes. The first night the volunteers provided these things to the soldiers was Christmas night, 1941--I can only imagine how surprised these soldiers must have been to be greeted, in the middle of nowhere, by women with fruit, coffee, and sandwiches! In a time of restriction, shortages, and rationing, this incredible volunteer effort continued every single day, from dawn until midnight, for four years. Most days, they gave out twenty bushel baskets of sandwiches a day....sometimes egg salad, sometimes pheasant! Word was passed as a train approached North Platte and the GIs were ready to debark as soon as the train pulled in, looking forward to the hospitality of the citizenry. Soldiers would often play on a piano that was in the train station and those inside sang along.

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