

One of the more intriguing exchanges in David Carr's memoir, *Night of the Gun*, occurs between the author and his daughter, Megan. In referring to the book her father is writing, she states, "I just never pictured you to be someone who would find this type of thing cathartic." To which Carr replies, "Bingo. That's my girl." Carr's response, 378 pages in, had the effect of whomping me up-side the head with a steel pipe. It took me less than an hour to find a Youtube video wherein Carr admits that he had had to do "a lot of self-rationalizing" about writing a memoir, and that he "did it for mostly commercial reasons." I realize it can be problematic to search for meaning outside a text; that said, knowing the author's purpose validates some thoughts I have about the book.

First, a brief synopsis. Early on in the text, Carr, a recovering coke addict, remembers being "86'd" from a bar, throwing his friend Donald on the hood of his car, and then Donald pulling a gun on him when Carr later shows up at his apartment. Only it turns out Carr has misremembered: he was the one holding the gun. The eponymous example serves as a trope for the remainder of the memoir as he considers where else his memory may have failed him.

Carr employs an interesting approach for writing his memoir, interviewing people from his past as a means of corroborating or refuting his memories. His voice is conversational, he's articulate, and the man certainly knows how to spin a yarn. Furthermore, weaving artifacts (medical records, arrest reports, legal docs, etc.) into the narrative lend credibility to his experience. As I was reading NOTG, it occurred to me that part of the appeal of Carr's memoir lies in the novelty of his experience. Most people haven't had substance abuse issues. Carr's story gives them a taste of the thrill and the danger, vicariously, from a safe distance. The premise, though, is not entirely unique as I have read other addiction memoirs, including Mary

Karr's *Lit, A Drinking Life* by Pete Hamill and *Drinking: A Love Story* by Caroline Knapp. Thus, I read to NOTG with some biases about what I expect out of an addiction memoir.

First, I was expecting more introspection. Some of this I attribute to the inherent limitations of the form he chose. Unlike New Journalism, where writers are part of the story, old school journalists were trained to report on what they observe, what others are saying and doing, but not necessarily how they feel about what transpires. As a reporter, Carr is not going to instinctively consider anything resembling causation. Beyond wanting to “feel different” the reader is not provided insight into the source of his addiction. Although he does acknowledge the existence of his addicted and non-addicted identities, the net effect of his approach reads like someone who is only willing to dig deeper based on what others have said about him.

As a narrator, Carr strikes me as a combination of a more erudite Jimmy Breslin and Jordan Belfort, minus the millions. In other words, he wants to be perceived as a tough guy of sorts, who doesn't shy away from enumerating his drug-fueled capers. Carr writes, “We tell ourselves that we lie to protect others, but the self usually comes out looking damn good in the process.” Despite the memoirists rhetorical imperative to look unflinchingly at the truth, the author ultimately gets to choose how he comes across on the page. How he represents himself on the page is further problematized by his acknowledgement that catharsis wasn't a motivating factor. Perhaps my biases caused me to come away from the memoir feeling it lacked a level of intimacy I expect. Maybe Carr is not interested, or capable, of writing the kind of memoir whose heartbeat goes beyond redemption and moves more in the direction of self-actualization.

While there were times when I feel Carr is an astute observer of the human condition, there were others where his attempts to wax philosophical definitely failed to resonate with me. Carr writes, “I now inhabit a life I don't deserve, but we all walk this earth feeling we are frauds.

The trick is to be grateful and hope the caper doesn't end any time soon.” Although I am glad he eventually sorted his life out and became a good father to his kids, I take issue with his latter observation, that “we all walk this earth feeling we are frauds.” What gives him the agency or authority to make such claims on behalf of the collective? I certainly don’t feel like a fraud. A fuck-up or an underachiever, perhaps, but not a fraud.

NOTG served as an important reminder of how all-consuming addiction can be. Reading it definitely makes me more sympathetic to my father. But there is another thought I came away with and that is how I want to be perceived as a narrator. I’m not suggesting the reader has to love, or even like, the narrator, but the reader should definitely come away with a sense that the narrator has been changed in some profound way. I get the sense that David Carr didn’t much care for how others perceived him as a person, either before or after he was in recovery. This is a double-edged sword in his memoir that makes him come across as honest, but also unapologetic. For myself, I know I have hurt people, alienated others and barreled forward unapologetically. On a subconscious level, I’ve told myself that it’s a consequence of being dealt a shit sandwich, others be damned. But now I’m wondering if my lack of empathy is a character flaw, something I really need to meditate on. If memory is not to be trusted, as Carr’s example illustrates, and we tell lies to ourselves to make the truth more palatable, I have to wonder: what lies have I told myself?