

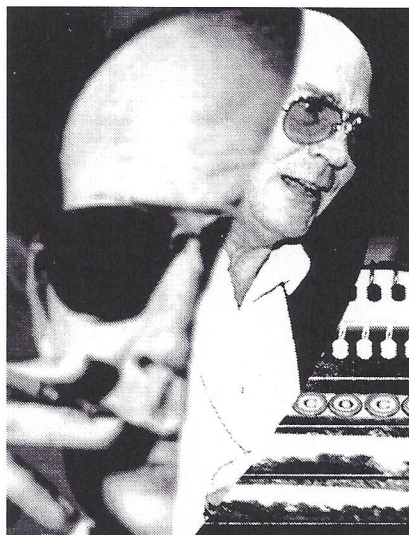
# BOOKS

## BIOGRAPHY | OUTLAW JOURNALIST

# GONZO LIVES

UF PROFESSOR STRIVES TO SEPARATE THE MAN FROM THE MYTH IN HIS ESSENTIAL BIOGRAPHY OF HUNTER S. THOMPSON

BY BRETT SKOL



AUDORA ARNIE/MIAMI HERALD ILLUSTRATION

### N.Y. TIMES BESTSELLERS

KEY: L = RANK (3) - Weeks on list

#### FICTION

- 1. (1) **TRIBUTE**, Nora Roberts.  
A former child star returns to Virginia to rehabilitate the farm owned by her grandfather.
- 2. (4) **FEARLESS FOURTEEN**, Irena Evtanovich.  
\*Mischonza Plum and her boyfriend become involved when a bank robbery goes bad.
- 3. (2) **THE LAST PATRIOT**, Brad Thor.  
\*Soldier in a Homeland Security subplot, searches for an ancient treasure.
- 4. (5) **THE STORY OF EDGAR SAWTELLE**, David Wroblewski.  
\*A young male who can communicate with dogs helps rescue his Wisconsin woods.
- 5. (1) **SWAN PEAK**, James Lee Burke.  
\*Louisiana detective Dave Robicheaux can't escape trouble in Montana.
- 6. (5) **SAIL**, James Patterson and Howard Roughan.  
\*A sailing vacation turns into a disaster when someone attempts to destroy a family.
- 7. (10) **THE HOST**, Stephanie Meyer.  
\*Alien has been taken to Earth, but one woman won't surrender.
- 8. (3) **TAILSPIN**, Catherine Coulier.  
\*Mistress Flynn aims to take a fall.
- 9. (4) **THE BEACH HOUSE**, Jane Green.  
\*A woman's life changes when she rents out rooms in the Manhattan beach house.
- 10. (3) **LOVE THE ONE YOU'RE WITH**, Emily Griffin.  
\*A woman's happy marriage is shaken when she encounters an old boyfriend.

#### NONFICTION

- 1. (6) **WHEN YOU ARE ENGULFED IN FLAMES**, David Sedaris.  
\*The humorist's latest essays deal with middle age and mortality.
- 2. (12) **ARE YOU THERE, VODKA? IT'S ME CHELSEA**, Chelsea Handler.  
\*Humorous personal essays from the stand-up comedian.
- 3. (3) **FLEECE**, Dick Morris and Eileen McGann.  
\*Americans are lobbied by government, business, labor unions and lobbyists.
- 4. (7) **WHAT HAPPENED**, Scott McMillan.  
\*A former White House press secretary regrets being deceiving.
- 5. (7) **STORY TELLING**, Tori Spelling with Hilary Litalin.  
\*The actress's memoir, from her Hollywood childhood to her son's suit.
- 6. (5) **THE MONSTER OF FLORENCE**, Douglas Preston with Mario Spezi.  
\*An American writer works with an Italian journalist to discover a serial killer.
- 7. (11) **THE POST-AMERICAN WORLD**, Fareed Zakaria.  
\*An exploration of the rise of China and India and the global distribution of power.
- 8. (10) **AUDITION**, Barbara Walters.  
\*A personal and professional memoir.
- 9. (5) **THE PROSECUTION OF GEORGE W. BUSH FOR MURDER**, Vincent Bugliosi.  
\*The Missouri prosecutor makes a case for trying the president for the deaths of soldiers.
- 10. (6) **MY STROKE OF INSIGHT**, Jill Bolte Taylor.  
\*A brain scientist shares what she learned from her 1986 stroke.

#### PAPERBACK FICTION

- 1. (4) **LEAN MEAN THIRTEEN**, Janet Evanovich.
- 2. (3) **DOUBLE TAKE**, Catherine Coulier.
- 3. (5) **SOMEDAY SOON**, Debbie Macomber.
- 4. (2) **DEAR JOHN**, Nicholas Sparks.
- 5. (7) **STEP ON A CRACK**, James Patterson, Michael Ledwidge, and Eileen McGann.
- 6. (5) **BONE TO ASHES**, Katy Becker.
- 7. (3) **THE WHEEL OF DARKNESS**, Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child.
- 8. (3) **THE NAVIGATOR**, Clive Cussler with Paul Kempreff.
- 9. (3) **THE MACGREGOR GROOMS**, Nora Roberts.
- 10. (4) **RETURN TO SUMMERHOUSE**, Julie Benoin.

#### PAPERBACK NONFICTION

- 1. (76) **THREE CUPS OF TEA**, Greg Mortenson, David Oliver Reelin.
- 2. (77) **EAT, PRAY, LOVE**, Elizabeth Gilbert.
- 3. (12) **BIG RUSS AND ME**, Tim Russert.
- 4. (9) **WISDOM OF OUR FATHERS**, Tim Russert.
- 5. (29) **THE AUCADIY OF HOPE**, Barack Obama.
- 6. (104) **DREAMS FROM MY FATHER**, Barack Obama.
- 7. (90) **90 MINUTES IN HEAVEN**, Don Piper with Cecil Murphey.
- 8. (41) **I HOPE THEY SERVE BEER IN HELL**, Tucker Max.
- 9. (11) **ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MIRACLE**, Barbara Kingsolver with Steven L. Hopp and Camille Kingsolver.
- 10. (8) **MARLEY & ME**, John Grogan.

### FICTION

# Remembering the year everything changed

Well-written story of a family's secrets over the course of 20 years covers familiar ground, but it's distinctive nonetheless.

BY AMY CANFIELD

*The Condition* is yet another story about the lives of a dysfunctional family, but it's distinctive, with multiple points of view and intelligently crafted characters who are sympathetic despite their flaws. Most strikingly, they get over themselves and their histories despite the damage that's been done to and by them, which makes for an engagingly messy and astute novel.

The book opens in the summer of 1976, with the New England McKotches — Paulette and Frank and their children, Billy, Gwen and Scott — congregating, as tradition dictates, with extended family on Cape Cod. The couple's relations are tense. Paulette resents Frank's wandering eye and harbors suspicions that more than just his eye has wandered. Frank is consumed with his

career as a scientist. Billy is covertly investigating his sexuality, and Scott is an unruly handful. But the most important development concerns Gwen, who is diagnosed with Turner Syndrome, a chromosomal defect that means she will not physically mature beyond her already petite 12-year-old self.

Twenty years later, the stories move forward yet refer back to that pivotal point of learning of when "the condition" of Gwen's life changed. Jennifer Haigh gives each character secrets and conflicts — their own conditions, if you will — along with their mostly conflicting views on the state of their current lives and the family's unraveling.

Haigh excels at character development; each story is rich enough to be

story, peeling apart the way mainstream journalism works.

For Thompson, traditional objective reporting was simply "he said, she said" stenography and easily manipulated by politicians. Yet he also insisted on doing rigorous reporting before engaging in any inventive riffing. His ability to split the difference artfully is why *Fear and Loathing* still stands as a vital journalistic primer. It's tempting to call Thompson's 1972 work proto-blogging, though its investigative approach has little in common with the bulk of today's political bloggers, which rarely rises above dueling cries of "Bush is a fascist" and "liberal bias killed my dog."

Not that all of Thompson's original followers were necessarily more discerning. McKeen observes that in the wake of *Fear and Loathing*'s success, "many of his fans, the stoners in the crowd, merely responded to the outrageousness in his writing. They liked the swearing, the drugs, the apocalypse around the corner. They would have read an essay on sheep farming if it had a Hunter S. Thompson byline."

Unable to continue with his fly-on-the-wall reporting style — a visit to the 1973 U.S. Senate Watergate hearings resulted in a sea of autograph seekers — Thompson instead embraced his own caricature. Discovering cocaine that same year hardly helped.

By decade's end, Thompson was generating great copy for gossip columnists — a typical night out included gobbling mushrooms and falling overboard in a Key West marina as his runaway speedboat

then careened off into several other craft — but little in the way of powerful prose. There would be brief flashes of the old brilliance, but most of Thompson's output turned formulaic. "He could dust off some things that were unpublished," McKeen notes, "and he could connect the dots by pulling a few things out of a southerly office." Thompson admitted as much, dolefully telling a BBC crew in 1978, "I'm in the way. It would be much better if I died. Then people could take the myth and make films."

In that light, Thompson's death is as cautionary as it is tragic. And to McKeen's credit, he never shrinks from that conclusion. He appropriately gives the final word to Sandy, Thompson's first wife and the de facto editor on much of his early work.

Thompson's funeral was a fireworks-laden celebration, with a star-studded guest list ranging from John Kerry to Lyle Lovett. But Sandy chose to stay away. Hunter "was horrified by whom he had become and ashamed — or I really should say tortured," she told McKeen. "The image, the power, the drugs, the alcohol, the money..." (He never came close to that great American writer he had wanted to be. Nowhere close. And he knew it.)

Brett Sokol is a contributing editor at Ocean Drive magazine.

### IF YOU GO

William McKeen appears at 8 p.m. Aug. 15 at Books & Books, 265 Aragon Ave., Coral Gables. Free. 305-442-4408.

### STORIES

## Touting the joys of poetry

Narrators relish the power of language in this intriguing tribute.

BY PETER SCHMITT

"Poetry," Auden famously observed in his elegy for Yeats, "makes nothing happen." What isn't often remembered are the words immediately following that trenchant comment: "it survives. . . ." It survives even in a digitized age, offering what Frost called a "momentary stay against confusion."

Baron Wormser gives us 10 such "stays," creating everyday fictional narrators for whom a poet has proved significant to their lives. The narrators range from social workers to a high-school student, accountants to a carnival dunk-tank clown. Most English majors would recognize half of the poets invoked here: Blake, W.C. Williams, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath. Others are more obscure:

Elinor Wylie, Weldon Kees, Gregory Corso, Audre Lorde, Joe Bolton.

Wormser, an accomplished poet with eight collections of verse and three books of prose to his credit, has conceived an original tribute to writers he loves.

In the Gregory Corso story (titles comprise the poet's name and birth year), sequenced chronologically, the speaker is a South Florida social worker who deals with young runaways. He likes to read Corso to the kids at his facility. A charismatic Beat poet, Corso ran away once too. The William Blake narrator also works with a difficult population as an aide to mentally disabled seniors. Abandoned as an infant in a bus depot, he looks to Blake as the patron poet of the lost, the dispossessed. "How," he asks, "is it that we dare to ignore poetry? The words don't still my pain but they tell my pain that it has company. They tell it not to apologize."

The speakers have taken different and credible paths to poetry. An adult education class leads a retired pharmacist to the work of William Carlos Williams, the poet/novelist who was also an M.D. The pharmacist, his wife dead of pancreatic cancer, muses, "It's funny how you have these questions that you could have asked any day for forty-nine years."

Readers waiting for something to happen may have to go elsewhere: the book is not plot-intensive. A group visits a store; someone waits for a flight; a waitress serves a customer. The stories meditate on poetry's meaning in our impatient, contemporary world. Sometimes Wormser's folks are a bit easy or familiar: Wal-Mart, TV. His narrators are all highly articulate, less problematic in the carry than in the high-school junior who reads Elinor Wylie.

That half the poets took their own lives (including Weldon Kees, whose car was found at the Golden Gate Bridge and who was never seen again) is an irony not lost on these stories. What helps the audience endure doesn't always help the creator.

Peter Schmitt is a poet in Miami.



**THE POETRY LIFE: Ten Stories.** Baron Wormser. CavanKerry, 196 pages, \$18.