



Permanent Midnight

Jerry Stahl

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His byline appeared everywhere, from *L.A. Style* to the *Village Voice*, from *Esquire* to *Hustler*. He penned scripts for twisted cult classics like *Cafe Flesh* and *Dr. Caligari*. He banged out shows for TV mega-hits like *Moonlighting*, *Twin Peaks*, and *thirtysomething*. But even when Jerry Stahl was making five grand a week, he was shooting six. Careening from his luxury home to L.A.'s more hellacious neighborhoods, he financed a heroin habit that brought on the soothing hiss of oblivion, while it stole his health and smashed his career. Until in a private apocalypse straight out of *Day of the Locust*, Jerry Stahl kicked smack and emerged clean.

A searing, strung-out confessional in the lineage of Lenny Bruce, William S. Burroughs, and Hubert Selby Jr., PERMANENT MIDNIGHT chronicles one man's slide into the opiated abyss and his claw-marked ascent back into the light--heralding the return of the Urban Hipster to contemporary literature, infused with savage humor and relentless intensity.

Permanent Midnight Details

Date : Published June 2005 by Process (first published 1995)

ISBN : 9780976082200

Author : Jerry Stahl

Format : Trade Paperback 371 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography

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From Reader Review Permanent Midnight for online ebook

Jennie says

I hail Jerry as the next William Burroughs.

I wanted to place a few quotes here but found that I would pretty much be listing most of the novel!

Jerry's book *Bad Sex on Speed* led me to this memoir. He talked of being a junkie too well and was kind of relieved to find out he had been one. I held onto this book; dragged it out like the perfect night or last beer.

Jerry was a script writer for the famous 80s tv shows *Moonlighting* and *Alf*. He did drugs so he could cope with work; a first for me in a memoir dealing with substance abuse. I was both fascinated and pitied his struggle.

Fabulous journey, addictive in itself. His description of himself, his surroundings and emotions caused me to lose a few hours sleep hitting the next chapter. Brave, raw, dirty, sexy, sexual and desperate. Must read!

Marti says

This certainly has a deserving place in the canon of cautionary heroin literature (*Junkie*, *Songs They Play On The Radio*, *Wonderland Avenue* etc.). There are many cringe-worthy scenes that had me grimacing on the train. However, I think those are necessary because I cannot imagine anyone reading this and thinking: "Gee, heroin sounds fun!"

Beginning his writing career with artistic pretensions, Stahl finds himself making \$5,000 a week writing dialogue for shows like *Alf*, *Thirtysomething*, *Moonlighting* and *Booker* (stuff he considered "schlock" and which came about via a marriage of convenience arranged by a British woman producer who wanted to become an American citizen). For a while he is able to pull off his dual life ie. morning meetup with a scary looking ex-con at 5:00 am in a seedy McDonalds for some dilaudids; then, off to a writers meeting in Century City.

And yes, it gets much worse before it gets better. But through it all, you can't help but laugh out loud. Stahl is a great writer with a gallows sense of humor to which most people born before 1990 will relate (he has a pretty funny description of a lunch party Cybil Shepard threw for the writers of *Moonlighting* to which he made the horrible mistake of wearing white socks with a lime green suit. A mistake because he injected himself in the foot during the party and spent the rest of it trying to hide the blood stain).

As might be expected, Stahl came from an unusually dysfunctional family. Though affluent, he was the only Jewish kid in a blue collar town outside of Pittsburgh. Then suddenly he was sent to the opposite extreme, a boarding school for the WASP elite (where he says he learned to do drugs). His father, a judge, ends up asphyxiating himself in the garage with the family car. 30 years later, the mother still insisted it was an accident.

All in all, I had a hard time putting this down, although toward the end, there were a few things I thought could have been shortened (a relationship with a girl he met at rehab in Phoenix and several more relapses). He reaches the end of his dope thanks to celestial intervention of the LA Riots (which he was too out-of-it to notice at first). And that's where the narrative ends with no denouement or any sort of afterword.

Jason McGathey says

This book is like 450 pages and I literally read it in one day without putting the book down once. Fascinating, brutally honest stuff: Stahl was both a screenwriter for "Alf" and "Moonlighting," and a raging heroin addict. There is no cheesy redemption at the end - as the title would imply his nightmare just goes on and on. The fact that he is together enough to pen this book by the late 90s is hopeful, but inconclusive.

Bob Schnell says

I'm not sure why I'm continuously drawn to books by and about junkies but here's another one to add to the list. Jerry Stahl's memoir "Permanent Midnight" is a tragicomic tale of addiction. His story takes place in Hollywood in the 1980's and 90's. His career has gone from writing pornography for Hustler magazine to writing episodes of ALF, Moonlighting and thirtysomething. It seems that the more out-of-control his heroin habit becomes, the more he is in demand. Until it all crashes down around him. Sarcasm, snarkiness and self-loathing abound.

Among the laughs and misery, there are plenty of squeamish moments, some of which were a bit too much for me. Repetitive descriptions of the rituals of shooting up tend to go on too long, too often. While I can openly laugh at Hunter S. Thompson's description of stumbling around Las Vegas in the depths of an ether binge. Mr. Stahl's lurching down the sidewalks of L.A., though played for laughs, seems more deserving of revulsion. I did sympathize enough to get engrossed in the story, but would have appreciated fewer gross-out scenes. I'll be interested to see the movie, starring Ben Stiller, to see how it is interpreted for the screen.

Kellie says

It took me almost 200 pages to reach a point in which I wanted to finish this book, but once I did, I was all in. It took me almost 200 pages to become interested in the life of an self-deprecating, insecure, unlikable drug addict. But this addict, who addresses everything with a dose of dark humor and an overall air of "who gives a fuck", eventually made me want to know where he ended up even if I didn't really like him. Underneath it all, an intelligent, interesting man, who never really felt like a man, managed to piece his addiction together and present it with an incredible level honesty. An honesty that I can't help but appreciate and, in a way, admire.

Zoe says

one of the best junkie memoirs ever written, style, Stahl has so much damn style..

Hudson says

Another disturbing tale about drug abuse along the lines of Requiem for a Dream and Trainspotting. This

was a fun read for such a dark subject, the author had a pretty good sense of humor and it comes through in his writing. Plus it was interesting to read about heroin addiction in someone who was a quasi celebrity and had tons of money.

Heroin, don't do it!

Ryan Leone says

Years ago, I had a great job working as a media broker for a major television network. I was also heavily addicted to heroin and crack. So here I am going to network meetings in L.A, nodding in and out, and trying to balance both lives simultaneously. One of my best friends told me that my life was reminiscent of a guy named Jerry Stahl and recommended the Ben Stiller film, Permanent Midnight. I really identified with it.

Fast forward a few years later and I am jobless, scoring in East L.A, and selling large quantities of heroin. I got busted and was hauled off to federal prison for four years. I remembered the movie and knew that it was also a book. So I had my dad order it.

Jerry Stahl is one of the genuine talents of his generation. The book blew me away. I'd classify it as a literary memoir, Stahl really flexes his writing muscles and tells his story in a refreshingly honest way. It wasn't self-indulgent as some reviewers have lamented. This was an indictment on the materialistic, ego-driven, who-do-you-know, world of Hollywood. This guy knows what he's talking about and it seems that some readers have mistaken his sincerity for something they don't understand because they haven't inhabited the world he describes.

Another complaint that reviewers seem to have is that his story somehow lacks validity because he was given so many opportunities for success. The fact of the matter is that he is a great writer. He attended Columbia University and worked his way from a seedy Hustler magazine job to writing for various television programs. He earned the opportunities presented to him. And heroin addiction doesn't discriminate... It can sink its claws into you no matter what socioeconomic class you are part of. Addiction is still just as horrific and the struggles are just as arresting.

Humor really makes this memoir stand out as the masterpiece that it is. Humor is the last coping mechanism that an addict has, after all of their other emotional responses have been stripped away. When I was an addict I made everything a joke, no matter the degree of damage I was inflicting on myself. When I was arrested, when I contracted hepatitis c, when I had to get a puss-filled abscess lanced; it was all something to laugh off. The majority of memoirs about drug addiction are overly morose. They talk about the misery and never make light of it. Consequently, they lack emotional honesty. This memoir examined addiction and was sure to point out its absurdity when it was needed, all done so in this dark satirical way, that any true junkie will find humor, truth, and comfort in.

Scott says

Stunning study of drug addiction and the seamy side of Hollywood. Stahl's writing is so natural and brutal, I loved every page of it.

Kailin says

This guy used the word "slime" as a verb one too many times for my liking. Although the story was engaging, there was too much lingo/slang in the way. I think it would have been better without all the jive, man.

Ann M says

This book captures the love affair an addict has with drugs. This book oozes love -- no matter what Stahl says about how ugly it was, he was in love with it and you can hear how lovingly he describes his awful behavior. He remembers every last detail as if he kept a scrapbook. As if he loves it still, the glamor (in the old-fashioned sense of having a spell put on you) of the powerlessness and the high. He was making a lot of money, which lessened the dangerous aspects of being a junkie. He was treated with respect by his suppliers because he was such a good customer. He didn't have to mug anybody. I think the love affair is something that non-addicts don't grasp, how much devotion an addict has to his addiction -- somewhere between love and religion. Maybe that's why 12 step programs emphasize trust in higher powers -- because addicts are already devotees. Lacking a stable personal center, they make the switch to something positive, spirit. Anyway, I see a few middle-class addict friends in him. It's sad.

It's also a good look at how Hollywood works for writers. I admit I skipped some of the personal laments to look for more on the industry. Interesting. His addiction was mostly ignored as long as he produced work, and one surmises addiction was not that uncommon, although coke might have been more popular than heroin. (I have an inside source for this info.) An enabling culture. He says "real writers" get a great deal of respect in Hollywood. The sangfroid of his agent made me laugh, telling him to turn the phone around -- the agent called while Stahl was so wasted he was talking into the wrong end. So, nobody was exactly surprised by drugs. And we wonder why Hollywood entertainment has gotten so bad.

Benedict Reid says

Passages of this book were amazing. Funny, Sad, brainless and thoughtful, all at the same time.

But...

This book didn't go anywhere. I really had no idea where Jerry had got to by the end of it. I suspected that he hadn't really got anywhere. It felt like it was written as a step on his journey towards recovery. But we weren't told that.

Instead we get description of trip after trip. Often lovingly described. It reminded me of William S. Burroughs book Junk, in that it was full of self-delusion dressed up as confession.

And it's sameness stopped being entertaining. I found myself preferring to read documents from work rather than returning to Jerry's book. Yet everytime I did return to the book I was amazed a how much I enjoyed every page. Then I realised, I would enjoy any one page... but 40 pages in a row and I'd get bored of the cycle. Take drugs, get into funny situation, realise what a stupid position he was in, try to clean up, fail, repeat... for pages and pages.

No wonder it took two months to read. I kept putting it down and not want to pick it up again.

Beth York says

honest, gritty and an authentic window into the exhausting dance between addiction, sobriety and the acts endured to experience the supreme, rock bottom and the beautiful.. in both worlds.

Matt Evans says

Stahl was a heroin addict. He also wrote TV scripts for "Moonlighting" and "Alf". When you come off heroin, so says Jerry, everything (and he means everything) hurts: showering, breathing, etc. Alf deserved better than Jerry gave him, but Jerry has since cleaned up and recently wrote a thinly-fictionalized version of Fatty Arbuckle's life that I've been meaning to read forever.

Daniel Parks says

You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll shit your pants. If you're a writer you'll wish you had his talent, his humor, and his guts.

Stefani says

Permanent Midnight is brutally honest, darkly funny, and frequently graphic memoir of the author's 20+ year drug addiction. Luckily, what I feared would be a wretched trajectory of downward momentum ended up being surprisingly upbeat and entertaining and quite funny to boot.

I particularly applaud Stahl's willingness to lay it all on the line, sparing no detail of his debased journey into the bowels of drug addiction from which he (eventually) emerges. In fact, he *dares* the reader to judge him—impossible to do as Stahl remains his own harshest critic—as he recounts what for many people would be an unthinkable act: dragging his infant daughter into a shooting gallery to score his next fix. His judgment is so heinous, even by the standards of a trap house, he is chided by a fellow addict who claims *even she*, who is barely able to hold her head up, *even she* wouldn't stoop so low to as to bring a baby there! He also routinely repays his friend's generosity by rifling through their medicine cabinets in search of pills; spurts blood and other bodily fluids anywhere it's convenient, and thinks nothing of pilfering cough syrup or any other medicine sitting out *not being used* (gasp)!

There were many “what the fuck” moments throughout the book, particularly when it's obvious that Stahl is intent on screwing up whatever good things are coming his way by exercising poor judgment and/or being blatantly high. Case in point: Stahl injects a speedball to calm his nerves moments before a big meeting with several producers. He emerges from the bathroom, sweat-soaked and jittery, twitching up a storm. He mutters an excuse about coming from the gym and...they literally do nothing. His excuses get more and more convoluted as addiction takes hold.

I'd used the flu for our first few meetings, switched to diarrhea to explain delaying meetings with my half-hour bathroom sessions, and was now reduced to malaria flare-ups and incipient leprosy.

Eventually, Stahl decides to call it quits on his addiction (one of many attempts) and hightails it to Phoenix to attend rehab. Even more humbling—but good fodder for the memoir he's about to write—he's forced by the program to get a job at McDonald's, a situation so absurd after his previous career heights, that I couldn't help but laugh.

Who'd have thunk, back when yours truly was stepping over the flooded toilet, fighting off the stench of grease and feces, holding his breath while he shot Dilaudid in the Venice and Western branch of this very institution, back in the wilds of Los Angeles, that I'd end up part of Team McDonald's.

It is a testament both to Stahl's strength of character and talent as a writer, that this book never wallowed in the depths of self-pity but soared to the heights of hilarity. Who'd have thunk?

Scott says

Permanent Midnight sets its tone in the first few pages, beginning with its author - Jerry Stahl - wearing a diaper to soak up the blood from his bleeding, post-op testicles. From there it descends into a story of debasement and self-loathing that is one of the finest and most enjoyable memoirs I've read.

Permanent Midnight is a crazy, strung-out taxi ride through a life where a near unquenchable addiction met a salary almost big enough to slake it. This is no rock'n'roll I-took-lots-of-drugs-and-went-a-bit-far memoir. This is a dirty, life ruining, career ruining story where the profoundly negative impact of Stahl's substance use on his life is never far from the reader's mind.

This is a fascinating tale of a motivated man who combined a powerful work ethic with self-hatred and drug abuse. Jerry Stahl is a guy who would go for regular jogs, but would blast himself with a dose of speed beforehand so he could run faster. He regularly got into work early so he could prepare an intravenous breakfast speedball and sterilise his needle with the office bottle of photocopier cleaner. This is a guy who started out writing for adult magazines and on porn films and became a successful screenwriter in the eighties, pulling down five large a week at his peak. Remember ALF? Stahl wrote for that show. Moonlighting? That one too. And he hated all of it, with a self-loathing passion that fueled his habit.

We see Stahl (who is Jewish) befriend a neo-nazi drug dealer (complete with Swastika tattoos), taking his baby daughter along to heroin deals, flaking out in a toilet during an important production meeting, and explaining the strange, perma-long-sleeved life of the injecting drug user. He lives a tightrope double life of public success and secret squalor, blowing his relationships and opportunities for genuine, meaningful work while he pumps out dross for the shows that employ him. There's no happy ending here. Stahl doesn't cheat his readers with false redemption, rather he records his descent in full, and gives us the full trajectory of his dissolution.

The bestselling story of a drug addict's fall from the top to rock bottom (and back up again after the publication of said bestseller) is a publishing cliché, but Stahl's story transcends the genre. What separates *Permanent Midnight* from the masses of such stories is Stahl's ever-present dark humour. Stahl possesses a sharp wit, an eye for his own absurdities and the writing chops to bring seriously funny moments into an otherwise grim tale - I was genuinely appalled by his story almost as often as I laughed aloud, and I laughed aloud a lot.

This book is a real ride, and I've not read a more memorable story of addiction and its consequences. *Permanent Midnight*, is an important work in the drugs-ruined-my-life genre, right up there with Burroughs' *Junky*.

Jennifer says

Received from FirstReads giveaway...

Every memoir of substance abuse seems to be described as stark and harrowing, and this is no exception. It's also no exception in that it was numbingly repetitive. If there had been a few more interesting anecdotes and a few less almost identical accounts of actual drug use, it would have held my interest better. I get it's a book about drug addiction, but it begins to feel more like the author is trying to relive that part of his life, one high at a time. Either that or he's using the "shock the reader and they'll think it's genius" technique.

Jeremy says

Surprised I didn't like it more, since I LOVE addict memoirs and this is supposedly King Shit of that genre. The jive talk was weird and it's overlong. Great shooting up stories, though!

Margot Note says

Said "Dang!" when I finished the book.
