



The Ticking Is the Bomb: A Memoir

Nick Flynn

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A dazzling, searing, and inventive memoir about becoming a father in the age of terror.

In 2007, during the months before Nick Flynn's daughter's birth, his growing outrage and obsession with torture, exacerbated by the Abu Ghraib photographs, led him to Istanbul to meet some of the Iraqi men depicted in those photos. Haunted by a history of addiction, a relationship with his unsteady father, and a longing to connect with his mother who committed suicide, Flynn artfully interweaves in this memoir passages from his childhood, his relationships with women, and his growing obsession—a questioning of terror, torture, and the political crimes we can neither see nor understand in post-9/11 American life. The time bomb of the title becomes an unlikely metaphor and vehicle for exploring the fears and joys of becoming a father. Here is a memoir of profound self-discovery—of being lost and found, of painful family memories and losses, of the need to run from love, and of the ability to embrace it again.

The Ticking Is the Bomb: A Memoir Details

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Curtis says

(4.5 Stars) Nick Flynn is one of my favorite poets. Whenever I tell people this (people who are familiar with his work) they always mention his 2004 memoir "Another Bullshit Night in Suck City." I haven't read that book yet, but said I have just to avoid the "oh my god, I can't believe you haven't read that!" guilt. Until now, I'd only read his poetry. His award winning debut collection, *Some Ether*, is one of my favorite books of all time and I reach for it often when I am seeking a creative spark.

The Ticking is the Bomb is fantastic. It's one of those books that makes me feel like I really haven't lived; yet, it inspires me and reminds me why I love books. Here, Flynn has poetically merged fatherhood and torture into a memoir that never felt weighed down by either subject. I was fascinated by his relationships with women, the tidbits about his writing life, his relationship with his mysterious mother and father, his travels, but most of all, his views on torture. Check out these excerpts from the book:

"I've come to believe that the function of torture in our society is not about getting information, in spite of what we might want to believe. It is merely about power. It tells the world that there is now no limit to what we will do when we feel threatened."

"What they will say when they look back on this time is that torture continued from the death of Christ for over two thousand years- a strange, primitive reenactment. They will see that at first we confused it with passion, which devolved into the Inquisition, and then transformed into what we now call information."

Renee Alberts says

Nick Flynn's moving second memoir is, at its simplest, a meditation on the shadow. In it, he focuses primarily on the idea of torture, combined with his apprehension about his pending fatherhood. As he explores these topics, however, the subjects include his past relationships, his family history (including his suicide mother and alcoholic, homeless father), and his own wrongdoings. Flynn was one of several artists invited to witness accounts of ex-Abu Ghraib inmates, many of whom were tortured and depicted in the infamous photographs. While Flynn makes clear that these brutal political and military acts appall him, his stance is far from righteous, as he imagines the humanity of both the tortured and the torturers. This perspective makes the memoir bigger than his own life or a single political argument—it becomes a reflection on the nature of fear and its power and on personal culpability as a citizen and a human. Brief, potent chapters stack and overlap with expertise pacing and irresistible intrigue. Although Flynn analyzes his own troubled childhood, his tone is never self pitying or sentimental. Instead, his prose is clear and vibrant, interspersed with passages so poetic they are breath-taking.

Audacia Ray says

A blurb on the back cover of Nick Flynn's latest calls the writing "impressionistic" - and that is so dead on. I loved *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City* so I was eager to get my hands on Flynn's new book, and it didn't

disappoint.

The book is put together in a bunch of short, punchy passages. I almost feel like writing "fragments," but it isn't very fragmentary, each piece is very much a whole, a rich piece unto itself, but also a part of the larger piece. The book is ostensibly about torture and becoming a father, but there are lots of other threads too. I think one of my favorite things about the book was the way Flynn plays with and investigates memory. There are many moments in which he refers to a book or a film or a piece of news - something that he easily could have looked up - and says that he can't remember whether it ended this way or that, or whether it was called this or that, or what the key character's name was. I found that conscious representation of the failure of memory and the blurring of details (and not always unimportant ones) just really gorgeous.

Peter Clothier says

I obviously did not want to read this book. It first arrived in the mail, as an advance review copy, a several months ago, and I consigned it casually to the pile of books that I might read some day. But I didn't read it. There was something about it, obviously, that I did not like. Perhaps it was the cover. Perhaps it was the color of the cover--a bright lemon yellow. Perhaps it was the title of one of the author's previous publications, boldly printed at the bottom of the cover, to pull the reader (reviewer) in: "Another Bullshit Night in Suck City." Spare me, I may have thought. Perhaps it was the image on the cover that I found offensive, a squatting figure vaguely resembling the Buddha, fingertips barely touching, in meditation posture, doubling as a bomb or hand grenade with a lit fuse attached. Perhaps it was the book's title, *The Ticking Is the Bomb*, which I may have judged to be at once obscene and cute. Then, a couple of months later, the hard copy arrived and I still did not want to read it.

Then, just two days ago, for whatever reason, I picked it up. Perhaps something moves us to pick up a book just when we need to read it. Because I soon realized--a few pages in--that this was, is, an important, urgent, timely book, and one that I had to read. I re-learned a lesson from that ridiculous old cliché: you can't judge a book by its cover...

So here it is, *The Ticking Is the Bomb*, by Nick Flynn. I have just finished reading it, and was engrossed from the first page to the last of the notes, at the end, citing sources from the book's wide-ranging, generous quotations and references and offering further insight into its meaning. (Even these were as unconventional as the text itself, rejecting that old, familiar academic format.)

It's a memoir. Nick Flynn is about to become a father, and he is determined to face every last one of his demons before the event, in order, I think, to prepare himself. His personal demons, that is, and those of the world which his child is about to enter.

His personal demons include: a father who abandoned him early in his life, a jailbird (armed robbery,) a victim to demons of his own--alcoholism, addiction, homelessness, destitution, hoarding...; a mother, who abandoned herself to countless lovers, each of them tortured in his own way, or criminal, and who ended her own life with a bullet, leaving her son to agonize over her loss; his own addictions (Nick's) to alcohol, drugs, women. At the start he is "in love" with two, faithful to neither and unable to trust himself to a commitment. He is lost. He seeks to lose himself, literally, for a spell, at sea. He rejects the comfort and stability of an anchor.

And the demons of the world at large: war--the ghosts of Vietnam, the needless bloodshed in Iraq...--terror,

corruption, torture, institutional lies, profiteering. Greed for power. Cruelty. Torture. Flynn keeps bringing us back to torture. The recurring theme in so many of the brief, a-chronological entries in this memoir is Abu Ghraib, the Bush administration's justification and use of torture in the wake of the destruction of the Twin Towers. We are implicated, in these pages, in an America whose values have been perverted in the name of national security. Our Virgil, through this Dante-esque vision of inferno, is tortured by his own implication, the perversion of his soul. He does not spare himself, in the journey he must now undertake toward fatherhood, toward the responsibility of bringing new, young, innocent, beautiful life into this planet. He understands that he cannot look for salvation in the daughter he will soon be father to, he must find it in himself.

If he does succeed in finding salvation of a kind, in a world that threatens to disintegrate into darkness and meaninglessness, it is through this searing, unsparing, rigorous descent into the depths of his own mind. Each one of his--each relatively short, always gripping--excursions takes him deeper (takes us deeper) into the mystery of being human: having a body with its needs, having feelings, having families, having experiences with others, being surrounded and sometimes seemingly trapped by events beyond control, beyond comprehension, impervious to reason. He finds--I'm happy to say--in Buddhist teachings, including but not restricted to those of Thich Nhat Hanh, a way in which that mystery can be, if not understood or explained, at least accepted for what it is in each given moment; at least come to terms with.

The birth of Flynn's daughter brings him, at the end--I'm also happy to report--to a curious joy, a glimpse of light in the darkness, a sense of personal commitment and stability. His book is not an easy read, though it reads easily. I have not read any of the poetry I understand Flynn writes, but it is clear from these pages that he sees things, feels things, comes to terms with things as a poet--through the flow of words and image into language that is at once beautiful and strong. His book, as I said earlier, is urgent and important in a world like ours, a beacon of authenticity and courage at a time when too many of us cower with fear in the face of the world's vicissitudes and uncertainties. "The Ticking Is the Bomb" has much to teach us about our responsibility to ourselves and to each other, about personal integrity and fearlessness, and about the values we must each embrace if we are to be worthy of the gift that is our life.

Colin McKay Miller says

Delve in to any book of the Nick Flynn canon and you'll find a couple of threads that run throughout: 1) That his mother committed suicide; and 2) That he met his unstable father—who left when he was six months old—while working at a homeless shelter in Boston. Depending on what (poetry or memoir) book you read, one of these stories will be emphasized, so it's neat to piece together Flynn's past from various reads, but his latest memoir, *The Ticking is the Bomb*, was supposed to be different.

In the months leading up to his daughter's birth, Flynn had become increasingly obsessed with torture, outraged by the Abu Ghraib photographs, and wondered what kind of world he was bringing her into. This was 2007, but the memoir hops all over in non-linear fashion, plucking out a variety of memories—some lasting a paragraph, some lasting a few pages—on a variety of topics: the aforementioned threads, loving two women at the same time, his time as a criminal, etc., but again, this book was supposed to be different, focused on torture; questioning its validity, effectiveness and necessity, even in—especially in—a post-9/11 America.

I'm all for subtlety, throwing out seemingly unrelated parts of the past and seeing how it shapes who we are now, what we believe, but *The Ticking is the Bomb* doesn't have the focus that it should. There are some great sections on Flynn's interview with a man who was held at Abu Ghraib, watching one of his mother's former boyfriends return to Vietnam to ask for forgiveness, his own experiences in foreign countries and

becoming a father for the first time, but there's just not enough on the main topic and too much of everything else. I don't mind having the old safety stories re-explored—even when Flynn is reusing phrases from his poetry, simply putting back together what line breaks snapped—but if torture was the focus, the end product doesn't show it.

Maybe the torture topic would have been best covered in a shorter, more direct essay. Maybe he could have gone through a history of torture, covering various angles, various political and personal opinions, various people from all sides of the debate—something I would take when filtered through Flynn's style—but as much as I love the author's even voice, his delicate choosing of each word, *The Ticking is the Bomb* is a lot of missed opportunity and the countdown doesn't find a place to detonate. Read Flynn's stellar first memoir instead. Two stars, but reaching higher.

Patrick O'Neil says

I really liked Nick Flynn's first memoir, *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*. So when I saw the review for *The Ticking Is The Bomb* in the *Sunday LA Times*, I didn't even bother to read it. I didn't want someone else's opinion to get in the way. Luckily I was meeting a friend that afternoon to hang out in the rain, and we had decided to first meet up at Skylight Books - where I bought their next to last copy.

Flynn's also a great poet, which, at least in my opinion, greatly influences his writing. He doesn't get all wordy. He uses sparse strong language to convey hard subjects. In *The Ticking Is The Bomb* he writes of torture, love, fatherhood, relationships, suicide, childhood, pain, and expectations - he does it beautifully. His chapters are short, poignant, and at times heartbreaking - one that deals with his stepfather, a Vietnam vet, and his quest for forgiveness actually caused my eyes to mist.

I admire Flynn's style. Perhaps because I'm so goddamn wordy. My writing yammers on and on and around page twenty I get to the point. Compact prose is something I am trying to learn. Reading Flynn I take notes. Because this is how writing should be done.

Piper says

Nonlinear & meandering, he pulls the throughlines through this interesting memoir in ways that surprised me. Flynn is outraged & outrageous when he delves into the U.S. use of torture since 9/11, heartrending when he focuses on his parents & childhood. His impending fatherhood ticks away in the background...

christa says

One of the trickiest jobs in the world would be writing the summary of Nick Flynn's memoir "The Ticking is the Bomb" for the dust jacket. It is billed as being about Flynn's thoughts on torture after the revelation of photos from Abu Ghraib, juxtaposed with sonogram photos of his daughter. In true memoir fashion, it is also about his alcoholic father, freshly sprung from prison and living intermittently on the streets and in a shelter where Flynn works, his mother's suicide, and the sticky situation of being in love with two women -- one who is my favorite character in the movie "Say Anything." ("Joe lies. When he cries.")

This challenge of actual focus is something Flynn cops to early in the book. He isn't exactly sure how to

describe this piece to those who ask:

"If asked I'll sometimes say that I'm writing about torture, but I've found that if I say the word 'torture' many go glassy-eyed, silent, as if I'd just dropped a stone into a deep, deep well. Sometimes I say I'm writing about my unborn daughter, about my impending fatherhood -- five months to go, the clock's ticking -- but I don't want to jinx it."

His story has plenty of "Dear Diary" moments, dated entries, that are not in chronological order and about the size of a 100 calorie snack pack, about people, places and the more emo grit from Flynn's past. The drugs, the bad behavior, this girlfriend and that one.

Flynn is an amazing writer, plunking down quiet sentences that make really thoughtful paragraphs. His roots as a poet are as obvious as bra straps under a tank top. In a chapter called "Worksong" -- my favorite passage in this book -- he addresses how some days will be spent making love, some will be spent getting high, some will be spent reading "Ulysses" ... "Some of the days you are given will be spent in a strange city, and at the end of the day you will know that you have spoken to no one except the girl you got your coffee from, no one except here. There will always be days like this."

But, and you know there is always a but, I just could not get into this story. The lines connecting his stories seemed fractured. It would be best read roulette style: Pick it up and read a chapter, come back a few days later and read another random chapter.

His style seems to ooze with emotion and thoughtfulness, but lacks personality and so all of those emotional words become more clinical: Pass the scalpel. This is like the cliché of a homecoming queen, all beauty, no spark.

And this says more about me than it does about him: But when I figured out that the mother of his child is Lili Taylor, whom he calls "Inez," I took a greedy, E! satisfaction in reading sections about their life.

Sabiha Khan says

One of the best books I've ever read- connected, real, and heartwarmingly honest. Writing is simple while still being beautiful.

sarah says

I almost didn't read this book. I got it from the library, stared at it for a day or two, then shoved it in the bag I wasn't using and ignored it for a week -- sure the cover is bright and the title is catchy, but it's about torture and childhood and making a baby before you're sure what to do with one, and it seemed to have little to do with me.

Then one day I picked it up and flipped it open, and a few hours later I'd read the whole thing. What got me was really the way he moved among these topics, accumulating more than leading you through this web of interconnection, plotting points until a cloud of significance formed. Those inarticulables (?) we long for when we're looking for that next good book to read were hiding in those spaces, the spans created by stretching from one spot to another.

And I was in there somewhere between the most terrible and wonderful things we do to each other. All the questions I had in my own bewildering day weren't answered but they were held and accompanied-in-bewilderment with this book.

I'm pretty sure none of that makes any sense, but the short of it is that this book saved the day.

Patrick Brown says

There are a few books I'd like to mail to President Obama, not because I hope he'll read them and talk about them, and therefore get everyone else to read them (though that'd be nice) but because I think they say something about an important issue in a way that I simply can't. I could write Obama a letter about torture, about how I feel about it being used in my name, but it wouldn't achieve half of what Flynn does in this bizarre, floating memoir.

Somehow, despite enormous odds, Flynn manages to tie together several disparate threads here -- his relationship to his parents (his mother committed suicide when he was in his teens while his father is an alcoholic ex-con who lived on the streets for years), his partner's impending pregnancy and the tangled route they took to being lovers, and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. In the hands of another writer, I might have found myself craving more of the personal and less the political (or vice versa), but Flynn does the balancing act, in part because he refuses to commit to the strictures of time, weaving together all the different pieces into a whole that is much larger than the sum of its already considerable parts.

As one might expect from a poet, Flynn writes beautiful sentences and heartbreaking paragraphs. This is maybe the ideal book to read in tiny pieces, a bit here and there, as the mood strikes. Without a doubt, my favorite piece is "All living things have shoulders," about a scrap of paper he once found on the floor of a public school in Harlem. There are some incredible revelations in this book that Flynn delivers almost as asides (that his father may have been involved in the CIA's notorious MK Ultra program while serving time in federal prisons), and the notes at the end of the book are worth reading, particularly for their sense of humor, a welcome reprieve at the end of a very heavy, very emotional book.

Winston says

Nick Flynn's *The Ticking is the Bomb* tells the story of his life prior to his daughter's existence, a time when he is lost in the sense that he doesn't know what he is doing rather than where he is. The book is set in a variety of places (to which Flynn travels) over a large time span, which ranges from his childhood with his suicidal mother to the recent with his father. Wanting to reflect on his life in order to be prepared for his daughter's birth and role as a father, Flynn writes on his past experiences that have shaped him into the broken individual he is today in hopes of being able to love once again. Flynn dissects and analyzes influencing memories, a true reflection on his life which only reveals even more misdirection. The book thoroughly examines Flynn's life, which makes the rest of our lives look like a walk in the park.

In one particularly memorable scene, Flynn addresses the underlying source of his commitment issues. At the time, he is in love with two women, Inez and Anna, but cannot decide whom to stay with. He makes the decision that whomever he gets pregnant first will be the one he commits to. This may seem irrational, but because he is lost and doesn't know what he is doing, this is the best that he can do. Flynn acknowledges this and adds on that he is terrified of committing because everyone (especially his mother) who he has ever loved has died, leaving him as lost as ever. This has formed an imaginary barrier around Flynn over the years

that causes his misdirection and inability to truly love one woman. He ends this period of realization by rhetorically asking how Proteus, a mythical creature that transforms into your greatest fear, can turn into something as abstract as being afraid to love someone because they will be forever gone in the blink of an eye.

Ultimately, this story of a lost soul gradually finding his purpose in life is the story of Nick Flynn wandering without direction prior to his daughter's birth, grieving over his mother's suicide, dealing with his delusional and drunken father, and never being able to settle down with a single woman. It all adds up to a tale of enlightenment, an example of the impact of raising a child that shows us how parenthood can provide us with a newfound sense of direction and a purpose to live. The Ticking is the Bomb tells that story very powerfully, reminding us that at one point in our lives, we will be lost and we will eventually find our way, but what occurs between those two points in time... can change us for better or worse.

What I took away from this memoir is that every single one of us struggles on a different plane. It is that struggle that changes who we are as people and in depicting our own endeavors, we can influence and change others as well as ourselves. If I were to meet Nick Flynn on the streets of San Jose prior to reading his book, I would classify him as just another normal individual. There are no blaring indications that he was a lost soul looking for some direction. I would have never inferred that his mother committed suicide or his father was a homeless drunk. Without this book, I would never know how his life experiences have influenced his temperament, outlooks, and aspirations. I especially would have never known that this individual had the capacity to tell such an impactful story that directly relates to me. The Ticking is the Bomb portrays the strength of the medium of the paper and pen very well because it has taught me that my current situation is not entirely unique. Others, like Flynn, have gone through times similar to my own and made it to the other side. Therefore, maybe I can too.

This book gave me a feeling of companionship, faith, and hope, relieving a bit of the loneliness and oblivion of teenage life. Being a junior in high school on the brink of adulthood raises many difficult questions. What am I going to do with my life? At this point, I honestly do not know and after reading this book, I have come to the realization that not knowing is okay. In my perspective, I currently am a lost soul, just like how Nick Flynn was, because I do not know my purpose in life. I have recently been in a lackadaisical state of mind, going through the tedious motions of everyday high school life. While reading The Ticking is the Bomb, I noticed countless, metaphorical similarities between my life and Flynn's memoirs. Finding out that my current, mind-numbing chapter in the journey of life is not entirely divergent is extremely reassuring and bestows to me a real sense of hope and faith for the future.

I would recommend The Ticking is the Bomb because everyone can relate to extreme pain in the past, a current obstacle, and a fear to what the future holds. Self-discovery is mentally growing up and it can happen at any age. At some point in our lives, we must accept our past, leap over our current obstacles, and be ready to face what we fear. Nick Flynn illustrates this well because this memoir is the epitome of self-discovery, telling the world what were, are and will be. After his daughter is born, Flynn finally finds purpose and his life begins to fall into place. His wife and daughter bring him back to land after he was endlessly floating out at sea. Flynn used to view swimming as his escape from reality, but now he is enlightened. Water is now a luxury rather than a necessity; it is no longer an addiction. He tells the story of how one can find his way after being hopeless. He gives hope to those that are currently lost and insight to those that have not been. The Ticking is the Bomb is a must-read because it opens your eyes to reality and transports you into a world different from yet similar to your own.

jeremy says

nick flynn's newest work, *the ticking is the bomb*, is a memoir much in the same vein as its predecessor, *another bullshit night in suck city*, although much grander in scope and insight. whereas the earlier book was mainly concerned with the personal, in *the ticking is the bomb* flynn trains his poetic gaze upon a post-9/11 america that condones torture and entwines this troubling aspect of our present with his own growing realizations about life, love, addiction, and anticipating fatherhood. comprised of short, essay-like vignettes, the book shimmers with sincerity, candor, and wisdom. the more flynn strives to make sense of the insensible, the more it seems he understands facets of his own troubling past.

in many ways, *the ticking is the bomb* is concerned with the nature of relationships. flynn tries to make sense of his role in many a varied relationship; the one he's had with his father, his mother, ex-lovers, his unborn child, with those that countenance unspeakable war crimes, his craft, and his own unsettled past. this is certainly flynn's most mature work to date, and it is anything but subtle. flynn is a tender, thoughtful writer with a strong command of language, seemingly committed to writing with devastating intellectual and emotional honesty. *the ticking is the bomb*, like the best of memoir-style works, by the end allows the author to slip aside, leaving in his place a reader whom then must, for him or herself, withstand the penetrating gaze of self-criticism.

from "the uses of enchantment (flying monkeys)":

"sometimes the story we tell about ourselves can be a type of spell. sometimes it's about a love that never should have ended, sometimes it's about a family fortune squandered, and sometimes it's about a war we shouldn't have lost but did. sometimes it's an echo of a story from our childhoods, a fairy tale, a story of what could have been saved, what could have been salvaged, if we'd just held on a little longer. a story of not giving up, as they say in aa, before the miracle comes. or the story i carry, unuttered-- *if my mother had just made it to monday, bewildered but alive...* the structure of these types of stories fit into what is known as "redemptive narratives"-- *once i was lost, but now i'm found*. it's aristotle's *poetics*, it's jesus coming out of the desert, and now it's reenacted, over and over, on daytime television. by now it's nearly hardwired into us, but is it possible that this same narrative structure is now being used, by some, as a justification for the use of torture? the idea being that if we push the prisoner a little more, if we don't give up when it becomes unpleasant, if we can ignore the screams, the disfigurement, the voice in our heads, then the answer will come, the answer that will save the world. and if the tortured dies in your hands, without giving the answer, will this mean you were wrong, or merely that the technique must be refined? or if the answer he gives is worthless, if it is a lie, will that mean we must push a little further, hold on a little longer? force his head under water? make his eyes electric? does it mean that the doctors must be brought in, the feeding tubes inserted, the body kept alive? and if we continue to cling to this way of telling our stories, this fairy tale, long after we've found our way out of the woods, at what point can we then be said to be under the effect of some spell, some enchantment?

Oriana says

Unfortunately, my initial thoughts remained true throughout the rest of the book. I'm sorry, Nick Flynn, that your last book was so fucking good that anything else you write will (most likely) pale in comparison.

I'm still more or less reserving judgment, but as I'm now just over halfway through, I'm sad to say that I am not loving this nearly as much as the brilliantly incredible *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*. The language here is beautiful, sure, but somehow not quite as beautiful as there. The subject matter is much more nebulous, maybe as much philosophically essay-ish than plangently memoir-y. And there is a distance here that I can't quite describe – a wall, a space, a bubble perhaps, which I am unable to penetrate. This book deals as much with torture and current events as it does with Flynn's life, and when I read passages where he describes interviews with prisoners at Abu Ghirab and the like, I just can't *feel* the horror, the despair. Perhaps it's a failing in me, perhaps a general failing in humanity, that when faced with images or descriptions of very awful things, we (I) disassociate, step back, refuse to comprehend. I don't know, and I don't mean even to say that there are incredibly graphic passages here, because there aren't, it's much more theoretical, detailing at most "light" torture. I don't know. Perhaps I'll feel differently when I finish, but as yet *Ticking* has failed to reach in (out) and really *grab* me the way the raw, riveting, devastating *Suck City* did from practically the first page.

Philip says

As I've said before, I'm a sucker for a good memoir. As it turns out, I'm a sucker for any memoir - even if it's not *really* that good.

I'm not sure what it is that separates my appreciation of memoir from that of biography or autobiography, but I think it's this: whereas a biography or autobiography demand truth, for a memoir - honestly, only verisimilitude.

I'm not saying memoirs should be endless pages of fabricated, expanded or exaggerated stories... (i.e. James Frey you took it a little too far...) but memory fails and distorts honest attempts to narrate life. (Granted, I've never attempted this myself, but my wife and friends tell me my stories tend to get grander with time even though I believe and maintain I'm telling them the same way.)*

The Ticking is the Bomb is a memoir about the birth of a daughter, the homelessness of a father, the effed up love life of the narrator, and above all else - torture. Torture trumps the rest of the cards in the deck, which makes for an odd memoir because Nick Flynn had never been tortured. So, a lot of it is a memoir about what he thinks about torture and interviews he's had with famous people who have been tortured - but that doesn't really make it a memoir does it?

I've had a lot of thoughts on the issue. Maybe he was trying to mix his issues (his memoir) in with the issues of America (America's memoir.) If that's the case, I guess I'll keep it on my "memoirs" shelf.

Something else: using the very advanced scientific techniques of guessing, I'd say that 37.442% of this memoir is made up of Flynn's dreams. This guy has to be a genius. If I don't write down my dreams within 2-3 hours of waking up, generally they're gone. I'm not questioning the integrity of the author or anything. I don't care if the dreams were conveniently real or if he made them up to make the story flow. I guess my point is this: sometimes I get annoyed when people tell me the dream they had last night because, let's just face it... it's a little too crazy and it wasn't real.

Am I an apologist for torture? No. But I think I understand their rationale. Flynn seems to think that there are some people out there who enjoy torture. Maybe there are, but that's like saying there are people out there who enjoy abortion, or who enjoy war. Maybe there are a sadistic few who actually take pleasure in those

things - but they are not the majority they are sometimes made out to be. There's a difference between saying, "He thinks torture is necessary to get information to keep this country safe," and "He enjoys beating people."

All in all it was a decent book. I flim-flam on the torture issue sometimes, but generally come down pretty hard on his side of the fence.

Who knows how history will judge us? Hopefully somebody will be able to rewrite it well enough to make the entire world be filled with only heroes. If not, I just hope I remain mediocre enough to stay out of the books.

*Sorry for all the parenthetical asides. It's a bad habit.
