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SEPT. 12-18, 2008

The most powerful
exhibition of the
year opens on
Saturday at the
Corcoran.

(See ad in the Fall Arts Guide)

CORCORAN
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FAY-093

THERE ARE NO CHILDREN HERE

The best and worst of D.C.'s rec centers 24

By Arthur Delaney ■ Photographs by Darrow Montgomery

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meet Mital Shah

a former fashion executive at Vera Wang and founder of Well Souled

September 13, 2008, 2 p.m.

Relive the coffee shop moment that led to a six-month journey through South Africa and the formation of Well Souled, a company that intertwines travel, style and purpose "to connect to a destination as you would to a friend, to learn the shades of its personality, to engage."

Shah will sign copies of *Well Souled South Africa*, a linen-bound book chronicling her experience.

Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Tx1Stylas/Fashioning Identity*. For further information, call 202.633.4632.

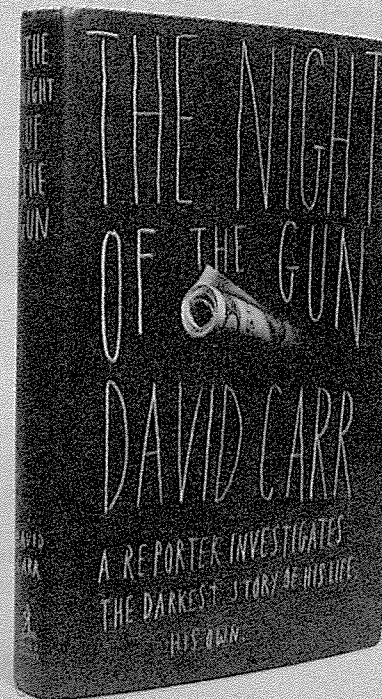


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BOOKS

speed reads



The Night of the Gun: A Reporter Investigates the Darkest Story of His Life. His Own.

By David Carr

Simon & Schuster, 400 pp., \$26

In 1999 David Carr, then the editor of this paper, declined to hire me as a staff writer. I suppose that should disqualify me from reviewing Carr's addiction memoir, but then *The Night of the Gun* questions Journalism Ethics 101: Carr's work challenges received notions about journalism, autobiography, and the nature of objectivity itself. Carr, a coke-dealing, coke-snorting, wife-beating, crack-baby-fathering bastard turned respectable *New York Times* reporter, dug up his own dirt by interviewing his wife, children, ex-girlfriends, ex-employers, and ex-drug buddies. The goal? Not truth, exactly. Just to "show up at the doorsteps of people I had not seen in two decades and ask them to explain myself to me," videotaping the results for a predictably brutal tell-all and a doubly brutal Web site. The book is an egotistical exercise in self-flagellation: Though Carr's merry review of coke-fueled romps with Tom Arnold and breezy treatment of a 2005 relapse isn't the searching and fearless personal inventory that 12-stepping demands, he flays himself for leaving his infant twin daughters in a freezing car during a drug buy and shamefacedly owns up to his abuse of women. For those who love dusted tales of druggy woe, *The Night of the Gun* outshoots *The Basketball Diaries* and outshines *Bright Lights, Big City*. But the difference is Carr's willingness to ask

an unanswerable question: "The meme of abasement followed by salvation is a durable device in literature, but does it abide the complexity of how things really happened?" Following the simple-minded national debate about James Frey's discredited 2003 memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, Carr's obsessive reportage on his addiction compels because it fails. *The Night of the Gun* is like an onion: Carr peels and peels for truths about his life but gets no closer to the center. In the meantime, he cries, and his hands stink. "I could be drunk tomorrow or shooting dope even as you read this," Carr writes, "but the chances of that are low as long as I make a daily decision to embrace who I really am." That's not the pedestrian declaration of a saved man—the documented complexity of what Carr has been through, and put others through, doesn't abide something so simple as salvation. It's the declaration of a helpless newsman who's unable to structure a coherent narrative from the available facts. Unreliable narrators are the only narrators left, argues Carr, and that argument has big implications—especially coming from a guy who writes for the *Times*. The book's title refers to Carr's murky memory of a blitzed night in Minneapolis in 1987 when he's unsure if he threatened his drug buddy or vice versa, and his inability to answer such small questions speaks to our inability to answer bigger questions such as, "Why are we at war?" or "Who is fit to be president?"

—Justin Moyer

Carr discusses and signs copies of his work Wednesday, Sept. 17, at 7 p.m. at Olsson's, 1307 19th St. NW. Free. (202) 785-1133.