



Cocaine's Son: A Memoir

Dave Itzkoff

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With sharp wit, self-deprecating humor, and penetrating honesty, *New York Times* journalist Dave Itzkoff turns a keen eye on his life with the mysterious, maddening, much-loved man of whom he writes, “for the first eight years of my life I seem to have believed he was the product of my imagination.”

Itzkoff’s father was the man who lumbered home at night and spent hours murmuring to his small son about his dreams and hopes for the boy’s future, and the fears and failures of his own past. He was the hard-nosed New York fur merchant with an unexpectedly emotional soul; a purveyor of well-worn anecdotes and bittersweet life lessons; a trusted ally in childhood revolts against motherly discipline and Hebrew school drudgery; a friend, advisor, and confidant. He was also a junkie. In **Cocaine’s Son**, Itzkoff chronicles his coming of age in the disjointed shadow of his father’s double life—struggling to reconcile his love for the garrulous protector and provider, and his loathing for the pitiful addict.

Through his adolescent and teen years Itzkoff is haunted by the spectacle of his father’s drug-fueled depressions and disappearances. In college, Itzkoff plunges into his own seemingly fated bout with substance abuse. And later, an emotional therapy session ends in the intense certainty that he will never overcome the same demons that have driven the older man. But when his father finally gets clean, a long “morning after” begins for them both. And on a road trip across the country and back into memory, in search of clues and revelations, together they discover that there may be more binding them than ever separated them.

Unsparring and heartbreaking, mordantly funny and powerfully felt, **Cocaine’s Son** clears a place for Dave Itzkoff in the forefront of contemporary memoirists.

Cocaine's Son: A Memoir Details

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Author : Dave Itzkoff

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From Reader Review Cocaine's Son: A Memoir for online ebook

Rick says

I so wanted to like this book. After all, I'm a big fan of stories of recovery and redemption and one of my guilty TV pleasures is the A&E show, INTERVENTION. But the book was a disappointment from the very beginning. For a topic so freighted with the potential for drama (a childhood shadowed by the specter of addiction), this was curiously bland. The writing, although it was competent, clear, and simple, was also colorless and flat. The author seemed to ramble and never develop themes that might have become interesting (e.g. he mentions becoming kind of obsessed with counting syllables, but never does anything with the idea). The book seemed to go on and on in a voice I would say could be best described as a monotonous drone. What did the author want me to feel? The worst thing about Cocaine's Son is that I never felt any kind of sympathy for the characters, not because they were not worthy, but because the author never gave me any reason to.

Bookmarks Magazine says

Itzkoff's distress and embarrassment at his father's behavior are tangible in this unflinching portrait of a troubled childhood. While the critics generally enjoyed this new addition to the genre, a few flaws hampered that enjoyment. Some thought that Itzkoff's story, with its rosy, upper-middle-class veneer, lacks the edge of similar memoirs, while others raised objections to Itzkoff's singular focus on his father, whose larger-than-life personality eclipses the other characters -- including Itzkoff himself. He spends a considerable amount of time analyzing his father's actions in an attempt to understand them, and these frequent ruminations, according to *Entertainment Weekly*, can be intrusive and redundant. When a fellow journalist publishes a book, the critics often take it easy on him or her. That the reviews were not glowing means there's less here than meets the eye. This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Christy says

I would have liked to know more about how his father's addiction affected his life. I would also liked to have had some discussion as to how his father was able to stop using drugs.

Harley says

This was a hard book to finish. It started off strong, but felt utterly pointless in the middle. I don't know why I finished this book...

Steven says

This was an interesting memoir, but less interesting to me than many others. The title oversold the contents.

This plays out to be a decent story about a son struggling to live with his difficult, addicted father. But the

father is complex--not simply an addict, but sometimes clean for months at a time, and in the end, clean for years. Then the book becomes a story of the son's struggle to forgive his father. He is not so much the son of cocaine as he is the son of a sometimes-addicted father.

Honestly, I thought the author/son was vindictive and unforgiving several times and seemed unwilling to face that about himself. True, if he lacks maturity or grace it is probably his father's fault. But as an author reflecting on his own behavior, he should have begun to recognize his own missteps.

Ellen says

Memoirs are understandably intensely personal for the author but they should be relatable as well. Unfortunately this book only fell into one of those categories. I appreciated that the book was not necessarily constructed chronologically but reflecting on the past as the author experienced things now. Our present always colors our recollections and it was easy to see how Itzkoff's childhood with an addicted father made him the man he is today but also how the man he is now affects his view of the past.

This is hard to say since they are real people but the characters were disagreeable and unsympathetic. It seemed almost cruel for Itzkoff (the younger) to force his father through literally revisiting the people and places that featured largely in his addiction. I also wondered throughout why Itzkoff's mother, who was lauded in the opening chapter and revealed to also have dabbled in drug use, and his especially estranged sister were spared the harsh treatment...or really any substantial mention

Throwing me over the edge was Itzkoff's \$5 words and "poetic" turns of phrases that did little to enhance the story.

Note: this was a Goodreads First Read so anything I say can and will be used against me.

Michelle says

Um, alright. I am not really sure how to review this book. Allegedly it's about a boy "coming of age" under the specter of his father's cocaine addiction. First of all, he's in college by page 44 so it's not really a childhood story. Also, for the first half of the book, you could replace "getting high" with "working" and not have to change anything else. Kid has charismatic and often absent father: welcome to the 1970s/1980s. Where was the grit? The horrible, life-changing moments? There were none. The biggest story about his childhood involved getting out of Hebrew school and his father was only tangentially involved. This is really a memoir of a random dude with a tense relationship with his father. I don't know, maybe it's a credit to his mother for keeping things semi-functioning around the household. And this is no cautionary tale. Apparently you can have a long marriage and highly successful self-made business and still be a major cokehead. Go

figure. Once again, a memoir sold a certain way in reviews that was completely different in execution.

Corinne says

Itzkoff's memoir is funny, honest, and touching. The book is a rather nonjudgmental examination of addiction, yet it is also so much more. Even without cocaine, Itzkoff's father probably would have provided enough material for an intriguing memoir. While addiction does play a central role, the reader - and I think the author - come to realize that the heart of the trouble is the inherently complex and angst-riddled personality of Itzkoff's father. The book delves unsparingly into the damage addiction can do, but the focus of the book seems to be more about the father-son relationship. My only regret is that there really isn't enough about Itzkoff himself in the book. The book seems to be written before the revelation that Itzkoff describes at the books end - that for all his observations of his father, his father has been observing him as well. Itzkoff's own life moments are glossed over, and I think it would have helped to know more about his experiences and perspectives in understanding the greater relationship of father and son. Overall, an interesting and worthwhile read.

Squirrel Circus says

I was pleasantly surprised by Dave Itzkoff's memoir of his efforts to reconnect with and better understand his father whose long addiction to cocaine had made him a shadow figure in his son's life. I appreciated that this was not a book charting the actual recovery of his dad or a book that solely focused on the author's childhood and how that childhood suffered under his father's addiction. It was refreshing to see that the book was set more in the not so distant past and included what happens to a family dynamic AFTER addiction. Clearly, Itzkoff's father has MANY emotional issues apart from his addiction, and it is touching to see his son try to understand, as an adult, what drives his father. While his father's past sins may not be forgotten, the process of forgiving has clearly begun.

Linda C says

I don't know quite what to say about this book. I will say that I'm glad that I listened to it as an audio book on my drive to and fro from work and didn't waste time actually reading it.

While David Itzkoff seems like quite a pleasant guy, his father does not. His father seems altogether unpleasant, but that nastiness does not appear to be related to his cocaine use. His father did unpleasant things, whether he was high or not. However, Dad never did anything quite unpleasant enough to warrant a 200+ page memoir, which resulted in numerous recitations of the same dull memories, over and over again, including Dad's sexual inexperience and Dad's discovery of his own father's glass eye, which apparently was quite a big deal in the family. Dad was domineering, overbearing and refused to take responsibility for any of his shortcomings. David Itzkoff's sister was never even named in the book, identified only as "my sister", leaving one to conclude that she didn't want to be associated with such drivel.

While Itzkoff's writing is sharp and witty, overall this is a boring book. Don't waste your time on this one.

Cindy says

I was willing to play along with the author's hyperbolic memoir until the anecdote about how installing a ceiling fan with his father "dismantled" their relationship and all the progress they had made in counseling. Oh, it took an extra day to install the fan after hiring someone off craigslist. There were ladders in his apartment all day! His dad said "whoost" too many times! The horrors! Hopefully the author grows up by the end of his story, but I decided there are many books I'd rather read instead.

ba says

Mr Itzkoff details his father's coke addiction, the effects on his own life, and his eventual attempt to come to terms with his relationship with his father by attempting to force his now-clean father to personally document his his life and addiction. It turns out they're both pretty nutty, and yet the book ended up being very funny to me. It looks pretty harsh to me seeing that sentiment typed out, but I'll try to mitigate that by suggesting the author's keen sense of self-deprecation cause that reaction rather than any lack of human empathy on my part.

Tracy says

Maybe I'm spoiled by some of the other drug abuse books I have read, but this one was a disappointment. The same kids of dysfunction was there, but the story focused heavily not on the dysfunction, but on the author's relationship with his father, and how he strived to understand his father's addiction. I'm sure that this was a truthful retelling, from his point of view, but I found his reactions to be very childish, and this led to me not feeling much empathy, or sympathy for him. I think that if you are looking for a book on the relationship between a grown man and his addict father, it might be ok. It was a struggle for me to get through.

Erin M says

First off, I have to clarify my rating for this book. I really enjoyed it, but had to take one star away because of all the typos. It was so bad it actually distracted me from reading at some points. I did receive this book in a giveaway as an advance copy, so I'm hoping there will still be some more proofreading and edits done.

Other than that, I really enjoyed Itzkoff's portrait of his father and their relationship. It was painful, complicated, but also simple, in the ways that many people struggle with familial relationships, and then add addiction to the equation, and all those qualities become even more pronounced. I am in general a fan of "addiction memoirs," I guess if I had to categorize them as such, but Itzkoff, in talking about his father's struggles, didn't shy away from also delving into his personal insecurities in a way that I found refreshing. I also found the inclusion of so much information about Itzkoff's father's involvement as a fur trader fascinating. The backdrop of this profession added to the rawness of the narrative.

Abbe says

Amazon.com Review

Dave Itzkoff on *Cocaine's Son*

Whatever the circumstances of our childhoods, we all grow up to become adults with questions about our parents and how they shaped the trajectories of our lives. What lessons were our mothers and fathers trying to impart to us? What pitfalls did they want us to avoid, and what mistakes of theirs did we end up repeating anyway? And how might we treat our parents differently if we were given a second chance with them?

These are all questions I confronted when I wrote about my relationship with my father, except that we were dealt a further challenge: for the first 25 years of my life, beginning in the 1970s, my father was addicted to cocaine. He was outwardly a successful man with a wife, two children, and a thriving business, but he struggled privately—and sometimes not-so-privately—with his drug habit, attempting everything from psychotherapy to voluntary institutionalization to cold-turkey purges to kick his addiction. When he finally got clean, I was an almost full-grown man, desperate to know who my father had been in the time I had missed, and as fascinated to discover who he had since become as he was to learn the same about me.

Cocaine's Son is as much my story as it is my father's: my chronicle of growing up enthralled by a man I could not fully understand, of our sometimes painful efforts, after his drug problem was conquered, to remain in each other's lives, and the unexpected twists and turns that invariably led us back to each other. Whether or not your life has been touched by addiction issues, I hope this is a story with something to say about your own experience as someone's child or parent.

From

Itzkoff's distress and embarrassment at his father's behavior are tangible in this unflinching portrait of a troubled childhood. While the critics generally enjoyed this new addition to the genre, a few flaws hampered that enjoyment. Some thought that Itzkoff's story, with its rosy, upper-middle-class veneer, lacks the edge of similar memoirs, while others raised objections to Itzkoff's singular focus on his father, whose larger-than-life personality eclipses the other characters—including Itzkoff himself. He spends a considerable amount of time analyzing his father's actions in an attempt to understand them, and these frequent ruminations, according to *Entertainment Weekly*, can be intrusive and redundant. When a fellow journalist publishes a book, the critics often take it easy on him or her. That the reviews were not glowing means there's less here than meets the eye.