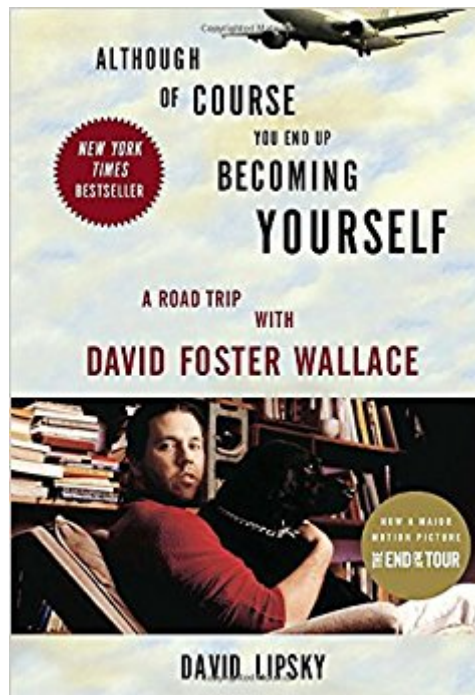


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Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip With David Foster Wallace



Synopsis

SOON TO BE A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE, STARRING JASON SEGAL AND JESSE EISENBERG, DIRECTED BY JAMES PONSOLDT

An indelible portrait of David Foster Wallace, by turns funny and inspiring, based on a five-day trip with award-winning writer David Lipsky during Wallace's "Infinite Jest" tour. In David Lipsky's view, David Foster Wallace was the best young writer in America. Wallace's pieces for Harper's magazine in the '90s were, according to Lipsky, "like hearing for the first time the brain voice of everybody I knew: Here was how we all talked, experienced, thought. It was like smelling the damp in the air, seeing the first flash from a storm a mile away. You knew something gigantic was coming." Then Rolling Stone sent Lipsky to join Wallace on the last leg of his book tour for "Infinite Jest," the novel that made him internationally famous. They lose to each other at chess. They get iced-in at an airport. They dash to Chicago to catch a make-up flight. They endure a terrible reader's escort in Minneapolis. Wallace does a reading, a signing, an NPR appearance. Wallace gives in and imbibes titanic amounts of hotel television (what he calls an "orgy of spectatorship"). They fly back to Illinois, drive home, walk Wallace's dogs. Amid these everyday events, Wallace tells Lipsky remarkable things "everything he can about his life, how he feels, what he thinks, what terrifies and fascinates and confounds him" "in the writing voice Lipsky had come to love. Lipsky took notes, stopped envying him, and came to feel about him "that grateful, awake feeling" the same way he felt about "Infinite Jest." Then Lipsky heads to the airport, and Wallace goes to a dance at a Baptist church.

A biography in five days, "Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself" is David Foster Wallace as few experienced this great American writer. Told in his own words, here is Wallace's own story, and his astonishing, humane, alert way of looking at the world; here are stories of being a young writer "of being young generally" "trying to knit together your ideas of who you should be and who other people expect you to be, and of being young in March of 1996. And of what it was like to be with and "as he tells it "what it was like to become David Foster Wallace." If you can think of times in your life that you've treated people with extraordinary decency and love, and pure uninterested concern, just because they were valuable as human beings. The ability to do that with ourselves. " "To treat ourselves the way we would treat a really good, precious friend. Or a tiny child of ours that we absolutely loved more than life itself. " "And I think it's probably possible to achieve that. " "I think part of the job we're here for is to learn how to do it. " "I know that sounds a little pious." "David Foster Wallace

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Customer Reviews

David Lipsky has done a laudable service for both David Foster Wallace and his readership with this jaunty road-trip/interview/memoir. As *Infinite Jest* was being launched in 1996 and Wallace was nearing the end of his book tour, Lipsky, a rising name in journalism, followed Wallace through the last week of the tour, the Midwest portion, and recorded almost every word spoken. (The piece was supposed to run in *Rolling Stone*, but never did. Bad timing due to the untimely death of a rock star and other foibles of the industry.) Lipsky interviewed Wallace without ever being obtrusive or intrusive. He allowed their relationship to form organically, gradually, and avoided a forced fellowship. Rather than a stilted outcome of an interview, this cohered with warmth, wit, warts, a wink here and there, and a wily charm. A salty, chatty Wallace emerges as a captivating and unreliable narrator of his own life. Lipsky precedes the interview with a mighty potent "afterword," a several page editorial that is also filled with specific facts about Wallace's depression and suicide. I sprung a leak; it was like he died all over again and I had to mourn him once more. It was tender, frank, and genuine. This is also the only section where it is revealed that Wallace had been on MAO inhibitors (an old-school anti-depressant) since 1989, a fact that Wallace chose not to reveal in the interviews. On the contrary, Wallace fairly denied being (currently) on any medication for depression.

Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself is essentially a transcript, set into 310 pages of text with minimal editorial work. Nothing appears to have been left out, and little has been added aside from

the frequent interviewer's notes, which resemble stage directions in a screenplay. Lipsky also adds a short introduction, a preface, and a sensitively written afterword, all placed at the front of the book. A list of cultural references (movies, television shows, songs, and books) appears at the end of the volume. The conversations are varied, mostly undirected, and sometimes repetitive, with abrupt transitions between topics and as the time and place suddenly change. The young Lipsky (30 at the time of the interviews, to Wallace's 34) quickly becomes a personality to the reader: what he doesn't reveal about himself in his questions, he reveals in the interviewer's notes. His envy of Wallace's success with *Infinite Jest* is front and center, as is his mistrust of his subject's generosity and openness. (Wallace, in a mixture of Midwestern hospitality, genuine niceness, and strategy, accepted Lipsky as a house guest and driving partner during the last stages of his book tour.) Whenever Wallace says something complimentary to Lipsky, the interviewer makes a note: Flattery. Trying to win me to his side. Cagily implying that we're equals. Flirting. But it's Lipsky who is infatuated with Wallace, astonished by every flash of humor, each revelation of familiarity with cultural ephemera (the movie *True Romance*; Alanis Morissette). Lipsky, a New Yorker, is particularly fascinated by Wallace's Midwestern way of speaking. Intermittently, he transcribes in dialect, recording Wallace's "something" as "sumpin'" and "doesn't" as "dudn't."

Probably the biggest question that you, someone who at least must have a passing interest in David Foster Wallace to be visiting this page, would like answered about this book is: does it deliver the goods? The book is billed as a conversation between the late David Foster Wallace and David Lipsky, a *Rolling Stone* journalist and novelist. Is it worth reading? I would enthusiastically say yes, even if you haven't cracked *Infinite Jest*, or finished *Consider The Lobster*. It's pretty true that you can get a good sense of the sort of person Wallace is by reading his work, but the book gets across a lot of new detail and stuff I wasn't aware of. The conversation is frequently engrossing, and it covers incredibly diverse terrain, including Wallace's very complicated relationship with fame, his interesting thoughts about pop culture and the future of entertainment and books (which are actually pretty optimistic, considering the sheer tonnage of writerly sentiment about the end of civilization), as well as a lot of stuff about *Infinite Jest*, then brand new, and what he thought the main points of the book were, with some argumentation and elaboration with the author about them. There's a lot about Wallace's drug problems and depression in here, which cannot help but be more than a little sad. Wallace sincerely believed that people just can't ever be completely happy, that there's a restless part of us that can never be satisfied, and while that is a debatable notion I do think it turned out to be true in his case. Lipsky tactfully points out some hints of Wallace's future trajectory along

the way, but one can kind of sense that despite the zeal that Wallace had for his work and for quite a bit of life, that the guy had a lot of issues and that writing never completely purged them.

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