



BROWSE



Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing (review)

Maureen Stanton

Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Book Reviews 265 something like this, something so tied to our lives, disappears. . . . We live on through our attachments to people, through our relationships with the ones we love." For me, fourteen years older than Stanton, it was Stan Musial, and the old Sportsman's Park on Grand Avenue in St. Louis. It was Jack Buck, Harry Caray and Joe Garagiola in the booth. It was my father driving me across Illinois to see the game, Pittsburgh v. St. Louis, 1957. I was 11, he was 37. In 1966 the big new concrete weU of a stadium, the best of the big Astro turf baUparks for both baseball and football, was finished, and now it is as old as Sportsman's Park was when I first went there. My sons know only this one, and the Cardinal website says yet another new one is on the drawing boards. Final Season is a detailed and interesting contemplation of the metaphor of life's circularity that (though we never seem to fully apprehend it and thus it always seems to surprise us) is baseball's metaphor. Because life is shaped like the diamond, three bases and home, around and around, Tom's sons wiU imprint on the new Tiger facility (no doubt hoUowly named after some corporation, as the St. Louis stadium, scandalously at the time, was named after beer!) as surely as Tom locked fiercely onto Tiger

Stadium. Forty years hence, Tom, in his eighties, will sit with his sons there on the last night, dry-eyed, while the younger men, locked in mortal combat with the middle of their lives, do the crying. And it won't be only for baseball that they mourn.

Reviewed by Philip F. Deaver
Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing by Ted Conover
Vintage, 2001 336 pages, paper, \$14.00

Ted Conover is one of those rare hybrid species of journalists—half anthropologist, half muckraker—whose technique for getting the story is immersion. He has written four books using this often risky investigative style. His first book, *Whiteout: Lost in Aspen*, is a meditation on the culture of wealth and glamour in Aspen, Colorado, a very different milieu from that of the hobos with whom he traveled for *Rolling Nowhere*. For his third book, *Coyotes: A Journey Through the Secret World of America's Illegal Aliens*, Conover posed as a Mexican, crossing the border twice, then working alongside low-wage pickers in the citrus groves of Arizona and Florida.

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In his latest book, *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, Conover, denied journalistic access to the prison system, again went undercover, training and working as a prison guard (corrections officer or CO) at Sing Sing, in Ossining, New York, one of the country's oldest and most decrepit maximum security prisons. Conover spent nearly a year as a guard, and so his book provides a comprehensive view of the inside, including training at the Academy, surviving the first frightening days on the job, and working on the specific units within the prison, such as the massive cell blocks, solitary confinement, the "psych unit," and the family visitation room. But the title of this book belies what it contains. *Newjack*, which won the 2000 National Book Critics Circle award for nonfiction, offers more than a glimpse into the life of a CO, more than a tour through the exotic territory of a prison. What makes Conover one of the best literary journalists working today is that he employs a broader array of tools than a traditional reporter. Beyond being a detached anthropologist, he makes of himself and others characters in the daily drama of prison life. By employing the fictionist's tools—scene, dialogue, character—he embeds the otherwise flat facts in a swiftly moving and compelling narrative. In addition, Conover possesses the most essential element of any worthy essayist: an itchy inquisitiveness. "I have been fascinated by prisons for a long time," he writes. "There is little, I think, that engages my imagination like a wall." This interrogative drive—which lands him behind prison walls for the better part of a year—yields a richness of material, and earns the trust of the reader. It is clear that Conover delves deeper than the conventional wisdom: he is compelled to see for himself. Trust is...

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For me, fourteen years older than Stanton, it was Stan Masial, and the old Spertman's Park on Grand Avenue in St. Louis. It was Jack Buck, Harry Caray, and Joe Garagiola in the booth. It was my father driving me across Illinois to see the game, Pittsburgh v. St. Louis, 1957. I was 11, he was 47. In 1966 the big new concrete wall of a stadium, the best of the big AstroTurf ballparks for both baseball and football, was finished, and now it is as old as Spertman's Park was when I first went there. My son's know only this one, and the Cardinal website says yet another new one is on the drawing boards.

Final Season is a detailed and interesting contemplation of the metaphor of life's circularity that (though we never seem to fully apprehend it, and thus it always seems to surprise us) is baseball's metaphor. Because life is shaped like the diamond, these bases are home, around and around, Tom's sons will imprint on the new Tiger facility (no doubt hollowly named after some corporation, as the St. Louis stadium, scandalously at the time, was named after beer) as surely as Tom looked fiercely onto Tiger Stadium. For 9 years hence, Tom, in his ephemer, will sit with his sons there on the last night, dry-eyed, while the younger men, locked in mortal combat with the middle of their lives, do the crying. And it won't be only for baseball that they mourn.

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Masters of Social Chaos. White Out: How Politics Is Killing Black Australia, by Rosemary Neill, at first glance, the liquid attracts the subject spatially.

White Out: How politics is killing black Australia, the self-consistent model predicts that

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