



Stop Forgetting to Remember: The Autobiography of Walter Kurtz

Peter Kuper

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WHO SHOT WALTER KURTZ?

Nobody. Walter Kurtz doesn't exist. He's the alter ego of me, Peter Kuper. But, if he were real, perhaps his obituary would read something like this:

Walter Kurtz, illustrator and self-exposing cartoonist, dies of embarrassment at 48.

Walter Alan Kurtz, born September 22, 1958, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Harvey and Olive Kurtz (an Ellis Island rewrite from Kurtzberg), was pronounced dead at Mt. Sinai Hospital on Monday. He was rushed there following his collapse at the publication party for his coming-of-middle-age novel, *Stop Forgetting to Remember*. Kurtz was among the wave of cartoonists who helped to redefine the medium of comics and ushered in an explosion of interest in the graphic novel. He was noted for drawing the world-famous "Ebony vs. Ivory" for *Nuts* magazine every month and for cofounding the political zine *Bomb Shelter* with his lifelong friend Saul Blockman.

As an educator and lecturer, Kurtz has encouraged legions of aspiring cartoonists to avoid entering the field. He was a successful illustrator whose work appeared in numerous newspapers and magazines, but his heart belonged to cartooning until the end.

Survived by his wife, Sandra B. Russ, and their only child.

Of course, a laundry list of Walter Kurtz's accomplishments barely scratches the surface of the cartoon character. Are professional details what define an alter ego?

"Brilliantly insightful," "Painfully hilarious," and "Pow! Blam! Bang! Comics aren't just for kids anymore!" are words I've heard to describe Walter Kurtz's work. Yet I can't keep from wondering whether this excessive praise comes from people who are ignorant of the medium's capacity to address serious subject matter like parenting and masturbation. But jealousy aside, the truth is, I could never bring myself to delve as deep and reveal as many embarrassing details as he has bravely (?) done in this book. The idea of exposing one's shameful history for all to see is beyond me, and frankly I'm still baffled by what motivates him. One can only imagine the discomfort this must have created for friends and family, most especially for his long-suffering wife, Sandra. My spouse would have killed me!

But let me not end these flaps on a down note. I personally believe his self-immolation illuminates our understanding of the human condition and helps comics take another step closer to receiving the recognition they deserve as a serious art form. The best obituary that will ever be written about Walter Kurtz is the graphic novel you hold in your hands.

He's dug his own grave.

Stop Forgetting to Remember: The Autobiography of Walter Kurtz Details

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Dov Zeller says

Ick.

I didn't finish it so perhaps I shouldn't rate it, but I didn't finish it because I found it to be pretty dreadful. Guy talking about being a comic artist, something of a fictionalized memoir all about being a nerd as a kid, doing a lot of drugs, trying to get laid. There are parts that take place in the present, with his wife, with his old friend, kind of connecting the flashbacks. The third of the book I read I find to be smug, self-absorbed, cliched, creepily objectifying of women. I've read a lot of books that have some similar subject matter. "The Alcoholic", "Brooklyn Dreams" are two I can name right off. Those books are interesting and captivating, they dig a lot deeper. And I recently read "The Worst Idea Ever." It's a much more kid-friendly book, but still, in a way, similar, and a lot more charming and soulful. "Perfect Example" by John Porcellino could be thought of as similar in subject matter, too. It's a lot more complex, subtle, emotionally present. Gabrielle Belle's writing about writing, the life of a comic artist, and maybe Ariel Schragg's too, and her writing about high school. Jeffrey Brown. There are a lot of comics who write about writing comics, and who write about their frustrating or painful teenage years and I've liked them all. I guess this one's just not for me.

Brenna says

An autobiography of cartoonist Peter Kuper, billed as "The Autobiography of Walter Kurtz," is a step or two removed from the author. In fact, it is also removed from the readership.

Kuper, famed New York-based cartoonist behind such as *Sticks and Stones*, *Give it Up! and Other Stories* by *Franz Kafka*, and *Stripped*, hides behind his alter ego of Walt Kurtz, presumably for reasons of privacy (more specifically, that of the secondary characters herein). However, he also relies heavily on the use of storybook narration - that is, each encounter in his life is depicted in the form of a narrated minicomic, and the tale is presided over by the adult "Kurtz" character.

The book itself is a feel-good, enjoyable read, and is filled with humour one might expect from Kuper - self-debasing anecdotes from his childhood, and the occasional self-parodic entry (his "Ebony vs. Ivory" spoofs his work in *MAD Magazine*, for example) keep the tone light and fun. Sadly, since the book was prepared over a span of a decade or more, it seems to lack a lot of the spontaneity or extemporization that a more contemporary effort would attain.

Not by any means a *bad* book, but a somewhat underwhelming one from this artist of renown.

Raina says

The autobiography of Walter Kurtz, but really an only slightly fictionalized version of the life of Peter Kuper. Really one of the better graphic novels I've read in a while. Covers all the normal territory of autobiog-ns, but the art is so sophisticated and the content is well thought out, meta-treated, and downright deep.

Quality stuff. Read it in one sitting. I especially appreciated Kuper's integration of experimental techniques (elements of fantasy/magic realism, creative use of color...) into the more traditional autobio context.

Lacolz says

Estupendo ejemplo gráfico de cómo romper la 4ta pared. Divertida, reflexiva, tristona. Se agradece la autosátira. Y te encariñas con los personajes y sus situaciones y con el estilo narrativo.

Liliana says

Hace poco empecé a leer novela gráfica y me he convertido en fan. La novela gráfica a diferencia del comic es una historia de extensión larga, ilustrada por viñetas y escrita por un solo autor (apuesto a que hay muchas más diferencias, pero esta definición me pareció muy práctica).

Hay alguien del que me he enamorado perdidamente Peter Kuper, él ha colaborado en publicaciones como Newsweek, Time, The New York Times y MAD (revista en la que dibuja la tira Spy vs.Spy) además de ser autor de numerosas novelas gráficas (algunas de ellas autobiográficas) así como de diarios ilustrados, otra de las cosas que ha hecho es ilustrar historias ya conocidas como la Metamorfosis y A través del espejo.

Una de las tantas cosas que me gustaron de Kuper fue su particular postura tanto política como de vida, él ha sido un crítico del gobierno de Bush y del gobierno gringo, en los distintos diarios que ha hecho de sus viajes muestra los diferentes matices de los países que ha visitado, para él "es importante tratar de hacer mi parte para buscar comunicación con otras personas, para decir algo y tratar de cambiar las cosas", creo que estas palabras resumen a la perfección el trabajo de Kuper y la razón por la que lo encontré maravilloso.

Si quieren comenzar a leerlo recomiendo estos libros,

Diario de Oaxaca

Mi favorito, habla de su paso por Oaxaca durante el conflicto de maestros en 2006, no solo explica la visión que tuvo del problema sino que muestra pasajes muy bonitos de la vida en Oaxaca, desde los olores que percibió, los insectos, la comida y las diferentes expresiones gráficas que podían verse en las calles.

Diario de Nueva York

En este diario nos muestra la historia y aventuras en esta ciudad, particularmente su paso por Brooklyn, así como su experiencia durante los hechos del 11 de septiembre. Este libro tiene poco texto y más imágenes.

No te olvides de recordar

¡Uy! este es otro que me encantó, es una especie de autobiografía en donde nos cuenta su historia, recuerdos de su niñez, adolescencia así como su experiencia como padre primerizo y el proceso mediante el cual se convirtió en ilustrador y escritor.

Me gusta porque se me hace un libro honesto narrado de manera agri dulce, sin ser ñoñísimo ni sensiblero,

logra conmove, reír y reflexionar :)

Jessica Severs says

Even for an alter-ego, Walter Kurtz seems to be drawn dangerously close to the reality of artist-author Peter Kuper, but the obscured lines between fact and fiction serves to ground the story and make it accessible to anyone who reads it.

Walter narrates the reflections on his past, leaving no humiliating detail unexamined, starting with his hormone- and drug-fueled adolescence. The pains of growing up are interspersed with his pains of being grown up: parenthood, losing touch with old friends and coping with 9/11 and the war that followed.

It feels extremely personal, that even if the details are a work of the imagination, the emotions are real. The story intertwines past and present seamlessly with an honesty that's almost painful to read at times, but it's irresistible and expertly illustrated to capture the often surreal journey of life.

Gary Butler says

10th book read in 2016.

Number 218 out of 503 on my all time book list.

Review Pending:

Hal Johnson says

The only thing worse than hearing one of your friends brag about his acid trips is hearing two of your friends brag about their adorable baby. Similarly, the only kind of autobiographical comic I dread reading more than the teenage drug fiend story is the "let's have a baby" story. The hipster and the bourgeoisie are the twin horns of lame, and these two emblematic narratives are like their spoor, left behind when they pass.

So Peter Kuper's *Stop Forgetting to Remember* focuses on drug use and babies, which is on the face of it a big problem. It also contains a "how I lost my virginity story" and a "I'll teach that bitch who didn't love me a lesson" story, all tied together by a chatty narrator ("Okay, okay! We get the picture! Jesus, don't you ever shut up??" one character complains. "Can't you see I'm trying to sleep?"); these are all red flags.

(Of course *Stop Forgetting to Remember* isn't technically autobiographical; the protagonist is named Walter Kurtz (a nod to both Harvey Kurtzman and Jacob "Jack Kirby" Kurtzberg as well as Walt Kelly), and Seth Tobocman is named Saul, etc. There may be other minor differences that those familiar with the minutiae of Kuper's life can seek out, but, really, Kurtz is an authorial stand-in if there ever was one.)

Adding to the problem is the fact that Kuper has incorporated a couple of older pieces into the text. When Pynchon did this in *V.*, he rewrote the interpolated story so its style would match the main narrative, but revising comics is really hard and time-consuming, and so the old material tends to stick out like a sore thumb, especially since it's not always well-integrated. The Richie Bush parody from *World War Three Illustrated* seems particularly shoehorned in, but then even a lot of the new material is awkwardly

shoehorned in.

If all of this makes *Stop Forgetting to Remember* sound terrible--well, it's better than it sounds. Kuper's storytelling is strong, he's just telling the wrong stories. And his art, although uneven, is at its best very striking; his distinctive woodcut style is abstracted enough that it lets Kuper slip in surreal or cartoony moments when it suits his purpose. When running like a scared rabbit, a character turns into a rabbit. When dizzy and confused, a character turns into a dreidel. This sounds rather simplistic and overly literal, but its execution is charming.

In the end, the real problem with *Stop Forgetting to Remember* (in addition to all the ones enumerated above) is, I think, one of distance. Kuper's neither removed enough from his experiences that he can look back dispassionately and analyze it (as, say, Chester Brown does) nor close enough to them to make us feel that the emotions are happening now and the trauma is our own (as, say, Lynda Barry does). The in between stage just feels kind of...awkward. The best part of the collection is probably the account of Kurtz's experiment with bisexuality, if only because straight men having gay sex is still taboo enough to require some courage to write about, which creates an interesting dynamic the rest of the book lacks. The fact that this portion of the book ends with a horrible girlfriend crawling like a worm, even turning into a little cartoon worm as she grovels over the phone--well, this is typical of the maturity level of the book.

Dave Riley says

It seems that if you have read one autobiographical comic you may have read them all.

As a rule of thumb (so that you know) comic artists and cartoonists live very boring lives enriched only by tattle tale sex lives that they illustrate very well on paper. Everyone of them will complain about the industry and go on about their struggle as artists.

That's the males, anyway.

After you've read a few they seem so same ole same ole -- often varying only in their penchant for misogyny.

Peter Kuper's efforts are better than others. More respectful of his female partners, more mature, more keenly observant of the rest of the world. Throw in his engaging and very inventive graphic style and you get a biopictorial better than most of the pack.

There's more confidence here. Less indulgent dross. It may meander a bit ..and in the end , not go anywhere special, but it works. If you are into the genre,*Stop Forgetting to Remember* is an essential read .

Chloe A-L says

the million-and-fifth "loser-kid-who-did-a-lot-of-drugs becomes an adult and makes a sexist and vaguely political autobiography/self-insert comic about being an Adult post 9-11" comic i've read. this one didn't even have any redeeming qualities. it read like a parody of the genre while not managing to be funny.

David Schaafsma says

I would have called it two stars, but Peter Kuper is a really talented artist, with all the brilliant woodcut work in his version of *The Metamorphosis*, his version with David Mazzucchelli of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, rich, sophisticated, nuanced, insightful, helping us rethink the nature of narrative... brilliant artwork.. and the art in this story, which is essentially the autobiography of Kuper, depicting Kurtz as a kind of alter-ego (?), and for what reason, and it is really not that funny or insightful or compelling. Not anything like the depth of Kafka, trust me. Included for humor's sake is what seems to be the obligatory memoir story of the shy, awkward comic would-be comic book artist nerd's long, painful process of getting laid for the first time... but not worth going out of the way to read, trust me. Nor are his not so insightful stories of getting stoned with his perpetually juvenile friend for decades, nor his stereotypically reluctant move to grow up and parent... meh. Stick to adaptation, Kuper, so you can focus on your considerable artistic skills. Since this is a book written some time ago, looks like he actually took this advice.

Michael says

And it's a pretty great book. If you've ever read Kuper's 1995 book *Stripped: an unauthorized autobiography*, you'll actually recognize a lot of the content - many old pages are re-touched and put into new contexts.

But where the first book was basically his reminiscence of his teenage years - too many drugs, too little sex, and lots of rock and roll - replete with his enjoyment of masturbation and the battle between his adolescent lust and his adolescent fear -- *Stop Forgetting* focuses on Kuper's alter ego Walter Kurtz at the birth of his first child. So the carefree days of youth are juxtaposed against the maturity of fatherhood.

As with Kuper's other work, his political leanings do come into play, though not too much. If you disagree with his leftist leanings, you'll only be bothered by his polemics once or twice - it's mostly background matter in the story of his learning to be a father.

I think Kuper's one of the best creators working in the business today.

Miguel Soto says

Tras una larga espera me hice de este ejemplar, lo primero que leo extensamente de Peter Kuper (no considero extensas las tiras de *Spy vs Spy*). He de decir que me gustó mucho pero no por las razones que esperaba. Sí se trata, como esperaba, de aspectos autobiográficos y cotidianos de la vida del autor, aunque por algún motivo (proyección propia tal vez, autoengaño a partir del juego de palabras del título en inglés) esperaba un tratamiento muy solemne de su historia. En realidad me encontré con un tratamiento muy reflexivo, metatextual ¿o metagráfico? pero con un genial humor ácido y nada de la solemnidad que me había imaginado. Fue grato leer las preocupaciones infantiles del protagonista, sus avances tontones por la adolescencia y su accidentada -como la de todos- adultez. Al final me dejó un muy buen sabor de boca, reconozco que no se parece en nada a lo que creí, pero me gustó.

Sarah says

This felt dated, and without having looked at the print date I could guess when it was written. Had I read it at the time, it might have felt new and interesting, but this ground has been covered better by other writers.

Gary says

Very dark and funny story at times.
