



Losing in Gainesville

Brian Costello

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Set in mid-1990s Florida, *Losing in Gainesville* hilariously explores what failure means in a culture where everyone is supposed to win. *Razorcake* praised Brian Costello's first novel for its language and attention to detail and *Bookslut* lauded its dialogue and conversational narrator. These strengths are once again on display in *Losing in Gainesville*. With an ensemble cast of slackers, burn-outs, musicians, and dreamers, who are all losing something—their youth, their ambitions, their careers, their children, their former identities—Costello builds a sun-bleached world of people struggling to understand what it means to succeed on their terms.

Losing in Gainesville Details

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Author : Brian Costello

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From Reader Review Losing in Gainesville for online ebook

Gretchen says

I think I liked this? I liked the different perspectives and mindsets of each character, I identified deeply with the story, and I liked the nostalgia/realism. I wish some of the chapters had been women though - I get that this is what the characters were thinking, but all the women in the story were largely just objects and that's kind of a bummer.

Pamela says

A bunch of slacker losers living in Gainesville. That basically summarizes the book. I was immediately drawn to this having gone to University of Florida for some four years... but that's where the similarities ended. While the guys and girls in these books seemed to just drink, party, and do drugs, I spent my four years going to class and hanging out with the same boyfriend I had for 2 1/2 years. No partying. No drinking. No drugs. So... I guess I just couldn't relate.

Most of the characters were these guys who I would have never even known or paid attention to. They lived on the fringes of society in these beat-up trailers and worked in record stores or restaurants or dumpster dove for food or got food from the Hare Krishnas on campus.

The references to Gainesville brought me back to college... but that wasn't necessarily a place I wanted to go back to. And since this is one LONG book, I never actually finished. I'm sure it would have just been more of the same... guys who just hung around doing whatever those kind of guys do.

Curbside Splendor says

Dudes...

Katie says

I wanted to like this more, but found it repetitive and a bit lengthy. Overall I dug the story, it just could have been tightened up.

Jamison Spencer says

Another great book about dead end artist kids, this time a little older, post collegiate and floundering. I still really identify with his characters and enjoy every story.

David says

There is a surprising amount of soul and beauty in the young nowheres going on in this book. The prose is tumbling and fast, describing vividly with grittiness. For all the young wastrels inside, there is a surprising seriousness to the book. It's a heck of a lot more than another slacker novel, with something to say to anyone who could pick it up. It's a good one, plain and simply a good one.

Ian Belknap says

I confess I could not finish this. And you're all like "but 4 stars, though?!?"

Here's the thing: I have failed this book, not vice versa. It is because of its precision and full-immersion in evoking a certain form of aimlessness, a formless, directionless interstitial time of life that I found stultifying, not because of any shortcomings in the book, but because of my personal experience having grown up in a college town (Amherst MA), and realize now I lived in terror of sliding into this miasmic and indistinct manner of wheel-spinning.

I saw too many people claimed by Hampshire College's declare-your-own-major/choose-your-own-adventure style of self-imposed academic indentured servitude; or the UMass bro-ham failure-to-launch totally-chill-lifeguarding-gig-is-good-for-now that stretches into a decade, or several other forms of wake-and-bake-then-piss-the-day-away-playing-Hacky-Sack-and-browsing-the-record-store pointlessness.

Costello nails this sense of desultory and sourceless dissatisfaction, this oppressive slog through indistinguishable misspent days. He nails it so fully and clearly that it gave me night sweats. This again is by no means his fault, but the result of my own deep-seated terror of succumbing to this form of purposelessness

Terence says

It wasn't as terrible as the worst reviews but some of the shifts in perspective seemed uneven and in the end kind of not very useful to the story. Of course it is up my alley, about Florida and a time I am really familiar with in the mid-1990s and I am familiar with Gainesville. So I recognized some places and people, BUT the overarching themes get established and browbeat the reader with its cynicism and listlessness. It could use some paring down I think. That said some of the core connections to sticking around a town after college and a scene was the most interesting. Could have lost 100-200 pages and been a more brisk read. Not the worst book I've read but then again not the greatest.

Michael Morris says

Despite the fact that this author has some obvious talent, this is not a good book. There are too many indistinguishable characters, weird switches in narration, occasional clunky flashes of omniscience, and too many downright sloppy passages. A good editor could have probably rescued something from the manuscript, but this version is no good.

Georgette says

Hilarious. Awesome.

Fast Times At Ridgemont High meets the 90's Alternative Crowd itching for a Days of The New reunion tour. That's the best way I can think of describing this gem.

I've said it before, I'll say it again, I know Florida is whacked, mostly due to the novels of Mr. Tim Dorsey. This just proves it further, this time in Gainesville, a city I never really gave two squats about before this little book.

By the way, it's not a little book, it's a good heft, like a man who had too many burritos at a Bears game and is aimlessly searching for an open Porta Potty.

(See? That kind of metaphor would not be out of place in Costello's portrait of Gainesville).

Costello is an astonishing writer with his descriptiveness. When you read that second chapter and Ronnie walks into the 7-11 and describes the smell of air as the hot dogs rotate on the warmers, you not only visualize it, you smell it in your damn house. I could envision the smell! His writing puts you into a place where you are lucky enough NOT to be stuck, you can shut the book, set it down, and you're safe- NOT in Gainesville. The quest of the characters and supporting hooligans in their attempt to make a hit record and be the next big alternative band, well, truly entertaining. The only thing I hated? That it ended.

Check out Costello's work. This book is out on Curbside Splendor, out of Chicago. (Thanks to Dave for finding it and ordering it).

G.d. Brennan says

James Joyce famously wrote "Ulysses," in part, so that if turn-of-the-century Dublin were ever destroyed, it could be recreated brick by brick by anyone reading his novel. On this basis, Brian Costello's "Losing in Gainesville" has been compared to Joyce, and it's actually a fair comparison. Costello's detailed and witty, a sharp observer of homo sapiens, particularly the floridianus subvariety, and his observations certainly paint an accurate (and more importantly, entertaining) picture of mid-90s Central Florida. What's more, his book's actually, you know, accessible, which is good and bad, as far as literary street cred goes. (There are, after all, passages of Joyce where even learned scholars don't know exactly what's going on, but by the time he put it out, his reputation had already been established by earlier works, to the point that few were willing to call bullshit on his inscrutable passages. In the literary world in particular, nobody wants to admit that the emperor's running around naked and crazy and has, in fact, become a syphilitic cokehead.)

By remaining fully clothed, Costello's somehow less mysterious, but certainly more comfortable to hang out with for longer stretches of time. His book isn't a fast read, but it doesn't need to be. A little indulgence is kinda the point in a work like this; recreating the center of a state and the middle of a decade certainly requires a fair amount of description. And it's appropriate; as anyone who's lived down there can tell you, there's a certain warmth-induced lethargy to the place, the slowness of alligators basking in the sun; even human activity throttles down to a swamplike pace. Or as Costello puts it, "The Floridian climate makes the easy, unchallenging life very comfortable, seductive, and it isn't something you can change overnight, wake up and say Ok world, let's get to work. Only when you run out of money does that happen..."

Costello does indeed work mightily to get it all down. The book's epic drinking binges and drug benders, its passages about satisfying music and unsatisfying jobs, are indeed unmistakably Floridian, and are (to this

one-time Floridian) spot-on regarding characters and scenes, finely detailed and accurate as hell. Even the bit players are described with a precision that would be annoying if it wasn't so well-done. (Later in the book, for instance, the protagonist, a ne'er-do-well named Ronnie Altamont who does a little bit of writing and a whole lot of drinking, is given a hit of acid by "...some Orlando girl he used to like way back in high school before she dreadlocked her hair and took to wearing giant candy-striped Cat in the Hat hats and shooting black tar heroin." There's a smirking cynicism to it all, perhaps, but that's still a marked improvement over all the books that don't really make you feel anything.) And while Costello works to earn those smirks, the overall work doesn't feel forced, but rather simply how it was.

One gets the sense that this is at least semiautobiographical, which, again, can be good and bad. Many authors writing about their own lives make the mistake of assuming things are interesting because they happened to them; a simple breakup becomes a swelling symphony of violins and achy heartstrings, a sad self-indulgent mess. And yet there's also great writing that comes from confessional fiction—Bukowski's novels, Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and his attempts "to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." The test, I believe, is whether the author's willing to turn the same critical eye on their own behavior that they use to observe others, or whether, instead, the book is just an excuse for ego gratification and score-settling, an extended jaunt through fantasyland, an effort by the author to exert a level of control over his or her characters in direct proportion to the lack of control they feel in the world-at-large. And Costello does frequently skewer his protagonist as well, even if he does let him off the hook in the end.

And we can forgive him for that, for amidst the pearly particulars, the beautiful descriptions of ugly people in a very specific place and time, there are plenty of grains of truth, great little generalities that work well on their own. "In the particular is contained the universal," Joyce said, and so, too, this book has a lot to say about the world beyond its world. In fact, it's not unlike The Kinks' "The Kinks are the Village Green Preservation Society," another work that deftly mixes descriptions of a very specific time and place (in that case, mid-century England) with perfectly placed observations about the human condition. "For so many, adulthood happens when the dream dies" Altamont/Costello observes at one point, and it's another point of contact between you-as-reader and this strange scene that's receding into the past. These characters may be selfish and self-centered, misogynistic and alcoholic, but they're also perfect for discussing the verities of turn-of-the millennium adulthood, and all of the dazzling dreams and squalid realities contained therein. You may hate them, but you'll relate.

Art Edwards says

<http://therumpus.net/2015/08/rock-home/>

Victor Giron says

Dude...
