

Running with Scissors: A Memoir

By Augusten Burroughs

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The #1 *New York Times* Bestseller

An *Entertainment Weekly* Top Ten Book of the Year

Now a Major Motion Picture

Running with Scissors is the true story of a boy whose mother (a poet with delusions of Anne Sexton) gave him away to be raised by her unorthodox psychiatrist who bore a striking resemblance to Santa Claus. So at the age of twelve, Burroughs found himself amidst Victorian squalor living with the doctor's bizarre family, and befriending a pedophile who resided in the backyard shed. The story of an outlaw childhood where rules were unheard of, and the Christmas tree stayed up all year round, where Valium was consumed like candy, and if things got dull an electroshock-therapy machine could provide entertainment. The funny, harrowing and bestselling account of an ordinary boy's survival under the most extraordinary circumstances.

Running with Scissors Acknowledgments

Gratitude doesn't begin to describe it: Jennifer Enderlin, Christopher Schelling, John Murphy, Gregg Sullivan, Kim Cardascia, Michael Storings, and everyone at St. Martin's Press. Thank you: Lawrence David, Suzanne Finnamore, Robert Rodi, Bret Easton Ellis, Jon Pepon, Lee Lodes, Jeff Soares, Kevin Weidenbacher, Lynda Pearson, Lona Walburn, Lori Greenburg, John DePretis, and Sheila Cobb. I would also like to express my appreciation to my mother and father for, no matter how inadvertently, giving me such a memorable childhood. Additionally, I would like to thank the real-life members of the family portrayed in this book for taking me into their home and accepting me as one of their own. I recognize that their memories of the events described in this book are different than my own. They are each fine, decent, and hard-working people. The book was not intended to hurt the family. Both my publisher and I regret any unintentional harm resulting from the publishing and marketing of *Running with Scissors*. Most of all, I would like to thank my brother for demonstrating, by example, the importance of being wholly unique.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

There is a passage early in Augusten Burroughs's harrowing and highly entertaining memoir, *Running with Scissors*, that speaks volumes about the author. While going to the garbage dump with his father, young Augusten spots a chipped, glass-top coffee table that he longs to bring home. "I knew I could hide the chip by fanning a display of magazines on the surface, like in a doctor's office," he writes, "And it certainly wouldn't be dirty after I polished it with Windex for three hours." There were certainly numerous chips in the childhood Burroughs describes: an alcoholic father, an unstable mother who gives him up for adoption to her therapist, and an adolescence spent as part of the therapist's eccentric extended family, gobbling prescription meds and fooling around with both an old electroshock machine and a pedophile who lives in a shed out back. But just as he dreamed of doing with that old table, Burroughs employs a vigorous program of decoration and fervent polishing to a life that many would have simply thrown in a landfill. Despite her abandonment, he never gives up on his increasingly unbalanced mother. And rather than despair about his lot, he glamorizes it: planning a "beauty empire" and performing an a capella version of "You Light Up My Life" at a local mental ward. Burroughs's perspective achieves a crucial balance for a memoir: emotional but not self-involved, observant but not clinical, funny but not deliberately comic. And it's ultimately a feel-good story: as he steers through a challenging childhood, there's always a sense that Burroughs's survivor mentality will guide him through and that the coffee table will be salvaged after all. --John Moe

From Publishers Weekly

"Bookman gave me attention. We would go for long walks and talk about all sorts of things. Like how awful the nuns were in his Catholic school when he was a kid and how you have to roll your lips over your teeth when you give a blowjob," writes Burroughs (Sellelevision) about his affair, at age 13, with the 33-year-old son of his mother's psychiatrist. That his mother sent him to live with her shrink (who felt that the affair was good therapy for Burroughs) shows that this is not just another 1980s coming-of-age story. The son of a poet with a "wild mental imbalance" and a professor with a "pitch-black dark side," Burroughs is sent to live with Dr. Finch when his parents separate and his mother comes out as a lesbian. While life in the Finch household is often overwhelming (the doctor talks about masturbating to photos of Golda Meir while his wife rages about his adulterous behavior), Burroughs learns "your life [is] your own and no adult should be allowed to shape it for you." There are wonderful moments of paradoxical humor Burroughs, who accepts his homosexuality as a teen, rejects the squeaky-clean pop icon Anita Bryant because she was "tacky and classless" as well as some horrifying moments, as when one of Finch's daughters has a semi-breakdown and thinks that her cat has come back from the dead. Beautifully written with a finely tuned sense of style and wit the occasional cliché, ("Life would be fabric-softener, tuna-salad-on-white, PTA-meeting normal") stands out anomalously this memoir of a nightmarish youth is both compulsively entertaining and tremendously provocative.

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From Library Journal

This memoir by Burroughs is certainly unique; among other adventures, he recounts how his mother's psychiatrist took her to a motel for therapy, while at home the kids chopped a hole in the roof to make the kitchen brighter. Not all craziness, though, this account reveals the feelings of sadness and dislocation this unusual upbringing brought upon Burroughs and his friends. His early family life was characterized by his parents' break-and-destroy fights, and after his parents separated, his mother practically abandoned Burroughs in hopes of achieving fame as a poet. At 12, he went to live with the family (and a few patients) of his mother's psychiatrist. At the doctor's home, children did as they wished: they skipped school, ate

whatever they wanted, engaged in whatever sexual adventures came along, and trashed the house and everything in it, while the mother watched TV and occasionally dusted. Burroughs has written an entertaining yet horrifying account that isn't for the squeamish: the scatological content and explicit homosexual episodes may limit its appeal. Recommended for the adventurous seeking an unsettling experience among the grotesque. Nancy R. Ives, SUNY at Geneseo
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

David Pimentel:

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