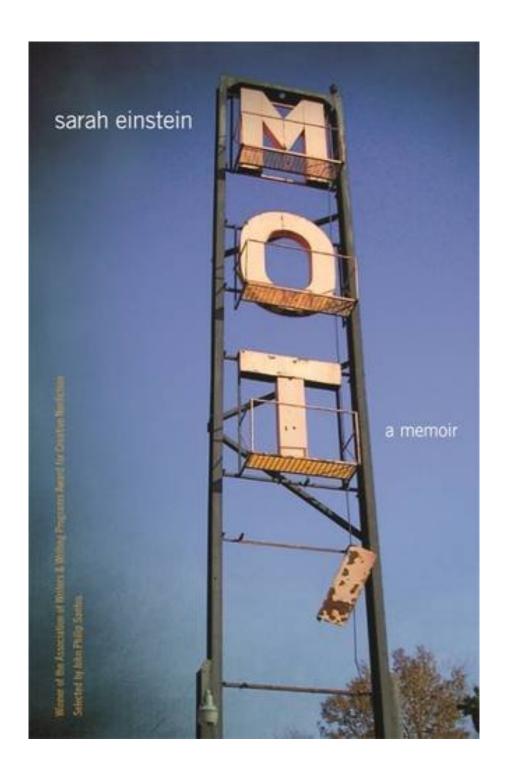


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MOT: A MEMOIR (ASSOCIATION OF WRITERS AND WRITING PROGRAMS AWARD FOR CREATIVE NONFICTION SER.) BY SARAH EINSTEIN

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At forty, Sarah Einstein is forced to face her own shortcomings. In the wake of an attempted sexual assault, she must come to terms with the facts that she is not tough enough for her job managing a local drop-in center for adults with mental illness and that her new marriage is already faltering. Just as she reaches her breaking point, she meets Mot, a homeless veteran who lives a life dictated by frightening delusion. She is drawn to the brilliant ways he has found to lead his own difficult life; traveling to Romania to get his teeth fixed because the United States doesn't offer dental care to the indigent, teaching himself to use computers in public libraries, and even taking university classes while living out of doors.

Mot: A Memoir is the story of their unlikely friendship and explores what we can, and cannot, do for a person we love. In unsparing prose and with a sharp eye for detail, Einstein brings the reader into the world of Mot's delusions and illuminates a life that would otherwise be hidden from us.

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5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

a story of acceptance

By Angelika Rust

First things first, I received a free copy of this one in return for an honest review. And boy, am I going to honest the hell out of it.

As the title says, it is a memoir, a true story, of a woman and a friendship. The woman is Sarah, forty, and struggling to stay afloat in the mess her life has somehow become. Torn apart by a job she doesn't feel she's up to and a husband whose attention is fixed on his psychotic client, she finds an odd sort of peace, or at least some sort of getaway, in her friendship with Mot, a homeless, insane man, who wants nothing from her other than acceptance for who he is.

With almost brutal honesty, Sarah recounts the days of this brittle friendship. She tells of little bursts of light, of the voices Mot keeps hearing and who force him to live his life the way he does, of tiny steps towards one another, of fear and anger, exasperation and despair. She holds nothing back – not the self-doubt, not the attempts to change Mot into someone who might survive the next winter whether he wants it or not, not even the realization that she might need him more than he needs her. And most of all, Sarah speaks of understanding, of acceptance, as she and Mot carefully tread around their tiny common ground, trying to agree on a version of the truth they both can live with.

All this is crafted with so much skill, it makes me hope Sarah might one day turn to writing fiction. I'm looking forward to the tales she might spin. I truly don't know whom I admire more – the woman, or the writer.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A RAW, POWERFUL STORY OF A HOMELESS VETERAN IN WEST VIRGINIA

By Hansen Alexander

In 2011 Sarah Einstein was awarded the prestigious Pushcart Prize for small press, non-fiction. When you read "Mot" you can see why.

With flawless style, a remarkable eye for detail, and gripping description, Einstein traces the decline of a homeless veteran with dementia at the same time her own marriage is imploding. With a large, giving heart that reminds one of literary giants who both shared their own genius and helped other writers and social causes, such as Victor Hugo, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, John Steinbeck, and Allen Ginsburg, Einstein tries to get into Mot's head to understand the mental suffering of a self- educated, self- reliant man who has spent the better part of 30 years sleeping outside in the cold.

While the literary technique of comparing an author to other writers in a review has probably overstayed its welcome over the last 50 years, it is difficult not to see the honest, raw, confessional style of another Pushcart winner here, Kathy Acker. And Einstein is not a fan of Dickens, yet her vivid description of a homeless shelter, and the hopelessness of doing much for its transient clientele tugs at your heart as much as the cruelty of the industrial revolution described by Scrooge's creator. Ironically much of Mot's struggle takes place in West Virginia, the state of much of Michael Harrington's revelations about the poor that led to the war on poverty waged by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Indeed in an epilogue Einstein appeals directly to the reader to take an interest in the homeless problem as much as Dickens appealed in his journalism to the English public to correct the terrible conditions his novels portrayed.

The deteriorated conditions Einstein describes with such vividness are not 19th century England, however, but rather 21rst century America, where Crystal meth and crack have changed the shape of homelessness and rural poverty. Einstein describes a Morgantown shelter where most of the forty or so people were homeless junkies coming in to sleep or use the phone to make a drug connection. They are angry, violent homeless men and women who spend their days on the couches there watching television, playing cards, or sleeping.

Typical of the men in the shelter is Wilbur, dying of stomach cancer, "a tumor the size of a bread loaf hanging over the belt of his pants. Wilbur's family had squatted on coal company land for three generations, living in the same tar-paper shack he had been reared in, working odd jobs, doing a little coal- mining, surviving mostly on hunting, growing a few vegetables, and a small Social Security check."

At a time in which the political class, particularly the Republican Party and its corporate masters, has successfully brainwashed the public into believing that the only poverty in America is from people who do not work hard, Sarah Einstein has told the truth about poverty and the homeless, and revealed the political class for the frauds they are. After all, why is the funding to take care of the homeless so little? Why is the United States the only major industrial power, and the World`s lone military Super Power, the only one with people sleeping in cars and on the cold ground of winter?

With Mot, Einstein attaches herself to the conditions of his insanity, which comes and goes in what the law calls "lucid intervals," with admirable sensitivity. "The trick is this: Mot knows that much of what he believes is untrue, that logical inconsistencies distinguish the imagined from the real. It's not possible to attack the heart of his delusions, but the details can be changed if I'm clever and can find a glitch in the logic...Then he will believe the new, more complicated version of the untruth until a new delusion subsumes and alters the entire narrative of his life that his illness spins."

Einstein invites the conclusion that we can find the truth by talking to and listening to the insane, a conclusion that goes back to Greek tragedy. Einstein also shows how healing-- in a strange way-- can be achieved in a relationship with the insane: there is something soothing and revealing about talking to somebody who may be deluded but is not full of guile and bullshit.

The structure of the book takes Einstein back and forth between West Virginia and the dusty edges of west Texas in Amarillo. She writes, "I've traveled to Amarillo in part to get away from the difficulties at work and at home for a while and to burn up the vacation time and personal days accumulated over the last year. I know it's strange that the first new friend I've made in many years is a mentally ill, homeless man who is twenty-five years my senior...Scotti tries to be supportive, but he sees my quitting the job as a failure." Einstein essentially quit after being sexually assaulted. Her husband "thinks I've made too much of the attack and am using it as an excuse...Mot "treats my fear as genuine, not as self-indulgence. And I need that right now."

[Hansen Alexander, a New York attorney, is author, most recently, of "An Introduction to the Laws of the United States in the 21rst Century," an Amazon e-book exclusive.]

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Le Mot Juste

By Taube Cyrus

In 2011, Sarah Einstein's essay, "Mot," originally published by the literary journal Ninth Letter in 2009, won a Pushcart Prize. It was a beautifully realized essay describing the author's friendship with a homeless veteran, Tom, who prefers to be referred to by the anagrammatic nomenclature, Mot.

As much as I enjoyed that essay, the brevity of the format necessarily left questions unanswered, suspended in space. The resulting portrait of Mot was like the tenuous remnants of a cobweb after a rain: One had to imagine the larger essence of the man and of the author's friendship with the man. In a word? I wanted more. (Recognizing with an ancillary jouissance that "mot" in French means "word.")

All this is to say, that, Pushcart Prize notwithstanding, this "Mot" is, at least for me, the "mot juste"— a more dimensional, more fleshed out account of a man who attempted friendship with another despite the dark and terrifying delusions of the mental illness he struggled with on a daily basis.

In Einstein's intensely riveting portrait, friendship with Mot is personal and very real--it is bowls of pho soup and apple pie in the back of a Camry. It is listening to "Car Talk" on National Public Radio and watching snippets of "Les Maitres Fous" on Youtube. Einstein's friendship with Mot is never construed as a rescue effort, a Messianic "klieg light" shining onto the darkness of mental illness, although it manages to offer small moments of personal illumination—whether by Mot or by the author herself: "This is a day when complex problems might have simple solutions, when buying light bulbs at Walmart is a real victory at the darkness."

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