



## The Gilded Razor: A Memoir

*Sam Lansky*

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## **The Gilded Razor: A Memoir** Sam Lansky

As featured in *People* magazine, *Vanity Fair*, and on *Entertainment Weekly*'s Must List! Sharply funny and compulsively readable, *The Gilded Razor* is a dazzling and harrowing memoir from debut author Sam Lansky.

*The Gilded Razor* is the true story of a double life. By the age of seventeen, Sam Lansky was an all-star student with Ivy League aspirations in his final year at an elite New York City prep school. But a nasty addiction to prescription pills spiraled rapidly out of control, compounded by a string of reckless affairs with older men, leaving his bright future in jeopardy. After a terrifying overdose, he tried to straighten out. Yet as he journeyed from the glittering streets of Manhattan, to a wilderness boot camp in Utah, to a psych ward in New Orleans, he only found more opportunities to create chaos—until finally, he began to face himself.

In the vein of Elizabeth Wurtzel and Augusten Burroughs, Lansky scrapes away at his own life as a young addict and exposes profoundly universal anxieties. Told with remarkable sensitivity, biting humor, and unrelenting self-awareness, *The Gilded Razor* is a coming-of-age story of searing honesty and lyricism that introduces a powerful new voice to the confessional genre.

## **The Gilded Razor: A Memoir Details**

Date : Published January 12th 2016 by Gallery Books (first published July 28th 2015)

ISBN : 9781476776149

Author : Sam Lansky

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Lgbt

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## From Reader Review The Gilded Razor: A Memoir for online ebook

### **Peter Monn says**

An amazing addiction memoir! I related to this so much since I got sober at the same age. Check out my full review on my booktube channel <http://youtube.com/peterlikesbooks>

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### **Jim Wise says**

In The Gilded Razor, author Sam Lansky chronicles his struggle with addiction from a very early age. I started this book out of boredom and ended up finishing it in one sitting. Anyone who has ever wrestled with the demon of addiction, anyone who has hopped from bed to bed in search of some unnamed angel, perhaps called "the dad I wished for," anyone who has ever come to the sobering conclusion that life can be one long slow-motion pulling of a trigger should read this memoir. Mr Lansky writes with the soul of a wounded poet who has found healing. Brilliant, profound and highly recommended.

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### **Cindy Knoke says**

Lansky is a very talented writer and this is a powerful, honest and brave story, that I recommend if you appreciate difficult memoirs. I do hope his next book focuses on something other than himself as too much self preoccupation can keep one stuck, which can be seen in so many good writers with difficult lives who write multiple memoirs about themselves.

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### **Noelle Walsh says**

This book was pretty good. The author writes of how difficult his life was and how low he went. One can only hope this author goes on to write more books that are equally well written.

\*won as a GoodReads Giveaway\*

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### **Amanda Zucoloto says**

3.5 stars. This memoir focused on addiction which is not something I've ever dealt with, so I found it somewhat educating. Overall, I wouldn't say this book was special to me as I didn't connect with Sam and his story, although I wish he had elaborated more on his life after treatment. On a side note, I was (very!) impressed by the quality of his writing, so props for that!

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## Rebecca Joy says

Very rarely do I have to force myself to finish a book, unfortunately that's what happened here.

I was truly intrigued by this book. I find addiction fascinating as an outsider, but also as a child on an addict. The reviews seemed promising, which only made me more excited.

This memoir, while beautifully written, was boring, repetitive beyond measure, and I felt like no story was fully told from start to finish. There was no fluidity and jumping around from one half finished story to another was confusing. I found myself being annoyed almost the entire time because of the "victim" "woe is me" point of view. I understand that's how he felt, but as a third party, it made me sick watching how he treated everyone in his life and the lack of responsibility, even after being clean.

The best part of the entire book was his first rehab stint. That's when I felt the most connection to the story and felt the author show some authenticity. Bi wish the whole story had felt the way that chapter or two did.

If you're looking for a memoir about drug addiction and what it's actually like, I would forego this book and find a different one. I'll sum it up for you now:

Drugs, sex, sex, drugs, whining, sex, drugs, repeat.

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## Maureen says

Breathtakingly written, heartwrenchingly sad, poetically shared- I read this book in one big gulp. I could not put it down. Lansky is a major talent- he should be proud of the vulnerability it took to write this memoir.

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## Michelle says

Well-written, gritty memoir about a young man's addiction. As a reader, your heart feels deeply for the "kid" we meet at the beginning of the book, who is already well on his way to disaster. He is so filled with shame (for things not of his doing) it almost cannibalizes him. You get the sense that part of the reason he takes so many drugs and sleeps with countless wretches is because he actually feeds off the shame...as if he thinks that's the way he's supposed to feel. Oh my heart broke for him a hundred times. And, of course, it makes me worry even more about the prescription drug epidemic (though he hardly stops there). In this book he comes out at 11, which seems early to declare one's sexuality either way. Having a 10 and 12 year old myself, I cannot fathom either of them making any sort of proclamation about who they'd want to have relations with. So it makes me wonder how much of his early abuse accounts for this. Again, heartbreaking that there are kids that are forced to contemplate such things at a very young age due to the egregious acts of adults. A sad tale but ultimately redemptive. The writing is honest and he makes no excuses.

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## Robert Moscalewk says

Maybe he saw in me the same sickness that I saw in myself – it was hard to miss – but the exquisite agony of that rejection was paralytic, reinforcing some privately held belief that I was

fundamentally damaged or defective.

True intimacy was a distant point on the horizon, too evanescent to count on. (287)

I apologize if this review will seem to some of you too subjective to be taken seriously, yet, as I kept reading Sam Lansky's memoir I had the feeling I could fully sympathize with the narrator, albeit I've had no experience with addiction. I have struggled with anorexia at one point in my life, and I know what self-loathing can do to people.

I also met Sam in New York City when he came to Strand Bookstore to talk about his book, and to be frank, meeting him in person has had a rather strange effect on my reading. Because here was this guy who seemed so fabulously and incredibly normal, a guy whose legs twitched nervously while sitting on the high wooden chair in the Rare Books Room on the third floor of the bookstore, and who sometimes struggled for words, and who kept saying that it was amazing to be there, and who hugged almost all of those who stayed behind to have their copies signed by the author, and thanked them personally for their support, but who, conversely, seemed so fragile and broken in his writing, so devoured by this "insatiable need for validation". That side of "Sam" that you will come to discover if you decide to read *The Gilded Razor* resembles an open city in ruins, particularly in the last few pages of the book when the writing turns to feverish hues and every instant seems to flow into the next one, up to the point when one cannot distinguish between them. The contrast between these two personas is simply stunning (which is most likely due to Sam's "miraculous" recovery, and current fabulousness). There were moments in my reading when I simply wanted to stop, look up, imagine Sam right in front of me, and ask him "Did this really happen? Or is this just embellishment?". The honesty of the narrating voice is at times almost uncomfortable: you'll read about excessive drinking, substance abuse, and sex orgies with unknown men, among other things (I'm a small town guy). But all of that honesty comes from a place of pain, and Sam Lansky has all my respect for having the courage of going "back there" in order to be able to talk about himself so freely. (I personally could never do it, and if I did that, I have always kept it hidden, swept everything under the rug of metaphor.)

"Pain", writes Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain*, "is a pure physical experience of negation, an immediate sensory rendering of 'against,' of something being against one, and of something one must be against. Even though it occurs within oneself, it is at once identified as 'not oneself,' 'not me,' as something so alien that it must right now be gotten rid of. [...] Pain begins by being 'not oneself' and ends by having eliminated all that is 'not itself.'" In this sense, at times during my reading of Sam's memoir I had the feeling that the narrator was acutely experiencing this break between his own self and that other thing represented by his pain, on the one hand, triggered by his parents' divorce, and reinforced, on the other hand, by his self-loathing. As the narrator himself explains at one point, one of the reasons for his substance abuse was the fear of gaining weight and going back to being chubby. Drugs are mere cover-ups in this whole narrative, a thin veil meant to postpone if not to deflect confrontation with one's problems. And in *The Gilded Razor*, the narrator does just that. He falls prey to his own body and the endless cycle of expectations he believes he is supposed to fulfill. The final feverish pages are, in my view, just what Scarry talks about in *The Body in Pain*: the moment when pain has eliminated all that is "not itself", namely whatever was left of the narrator's fragile persona, and has begun to act on its own, looking only to satisfy its own needs regardless of the consequences that kind of satisfaction entails. This is even more apparent towards the end of the book:

My father picked me up at Vassar the night before my flight. His face was stony as I carried boxes downstairs. Perhaps he was afraid of me, or maybe he was just incredulous that I'd managed to do this again. But I couldn't see what he saw, the pattern of embarrassing mistakes and unfulfilled commitments that was starting to become so predictable. I only saw the sharp-edged specifics of each little catastrophe, clinging to this insistent belief that it could have been different if only the world had been kinder to me. I would have told anyone who would listen

that the blame lay with the university that should have kept a closer eye on me, the parents who should have loved me more fiercely, the friends who were such a bad influence, the rehabs that failed to fix me. Just so long as I didn't have to admit that it was all my fault. (271-272)

In recollection, the pattern seems obvious. At the time of writing it all seemed predictable. But there is a sense that at the level of experience something else was acting on behalf of the narrator. Later on, in another moment of recollection the idea resurfaces:

Yet if I had been asked what I wanted on a grand, existential plane, I probably would have said that all I wanted was to love and be loved. *I couldn't say why* I thought any of the things that I was doing would bring me love, but I was so lonely, terribly lonely.

Maybe drug addicts are just people who feel loneliness with the acuteness of bad fever. I was quick to fall in love with any man who made me think that maybe we could have the sort of love that I always wanted. A quiet, domestic love that would provide me with the satisfaction that a thousand one-night stands never could. But that was also the kind of quiet, domestic love that I believed, even if I would never vocalize this note of internalized homophobia, gay men simply weren't allowed to have – but that wouldn't stop me from trying. (285, my emphasis)

And yet, that was the thing that bothered me most: the narrator takes maybe too much advantage of his position and explains matters excessively at times. He does go back there, in that murky place called pain, but he's always keeping one foot in the door, not entirely letting the reader inside the story. It is as if he feels this compelling need to tell the story but is yet too afraid to fully submerge in it, afraid that maybe he won't be able to come back perhaps. Except in the last few pages, the ones describing his last relapse before getting sober, the addict's mind is never *there*, present in the narrative, but is always filtered through that of the sober, older version of the narrator. It almost feels as if we're reading a patient's chart, written in the first person.

A pleasant read nonetheless. Totally recommend it.

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### **Jade says**

DNF page 52. I typically enjoy memoirs about addiction and recovery--the dark places people go to and their efforts to find health and happiness on their terms. Lansky makes it clear from both his use of language and the way he portrays the events of his youth, however, that he still views his past as more glamorous and edgy than anything else. Martyrdom is just not that attractive to read, especially when it's coming from a privileged male protagonist who squandered a secure, comfortable, and supportive upbringing and amazing educational opportunities. Lansky's abuse of prescription drugs and destructive anonymous sex seemed to spark more from boredom and a desire to change his image than anything else, and that just killed any investment I might have had in following the continued downward spiral to his eventual recovery process.

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### **Michelle says**

An astonishing and powerfully written LGBT coming-of-age story, also about the intense spiral of addiction and how Sam Lansky's life veered so quickly out of control in: "The Gilded Razor: A Memoir".

In Portland, Oregon Sam's parents announced their intentions to divorce, initially he seemed to take this in stride; until his mother, a therapist, went on a "dream quest" to unlock her spirituality, naming his father as the most emotionally/sexually repressed person she'd ever met. While his father promptly relocated to NYC, enjoying newfound freedom and bachelorhood. Sam observed: "They were too distracted to parent a child as precocious and strong willed as I was, and I had grown skilled at manipulating them into overlooking obvious red flags."

Joining his father in Manhattan, he attended the college prep Dwight School, which overlooked Central Park. With his father engrossed with his new girlfriend, Sam avoided going to class, completing his homework, got high with other students, and sought strangers out online to meet for sex and more drugs.

Understanding his sexual orientation from a very young age, Sam didn't have the typical issues of coming to terms with being gay, as most young men at 17. Sam had regularly scheduled appointments with Dr. Chester, who made the diagnosis of generalized anxiety-major depressive-ADHD which only added to his problems with numerous prescriptions to various pills . Sam seemed unrealistically determined to be admitted to Princeton. Instead, he ended up overdosing, and attending a series of three rehab facilities/programs.

It wasn't clear if his self-absorbed parents realized their actions likely were the root cause of his problems. However, to their credit, both seemed on stand-by with genuine offers to help him in anyway possible. Sam "clung to a sad little flicker of hope" in his numerous encounters that someone would actually love him, it never occurred to him to date like most people. This is an excellent intense fast paced read of sexual addiction and severe substance abuse, and later the long redemption leading to recovery. Sam Lansky is the editor of Time Magazine, his work has been featured in many notable publications, this is his first book. ~ With thanks to the Seattle Public Library.

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## **J David says**

A trite monotonous memoir. Sex, drugs, alcohol; then drugs, sex and more alcohol, then drugs alcohol and sex. He writes well but not worth reading.

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## **John Benutty says**

Re-classify "The Gilded Razor" as novel (sted memoir) and it is the literary companion to William S. Burroughs' "Queer" and James Baldwin's "Giovanni's Room." Lansky speaks as intelligently and directly about that familiar queer experience--one defined by dive gay bars, trysts with older men, drugs, alcohol, sex, shame and embarrassment--without ever defining his experiences or his book as such. Instead he tells the story of his emergence into adulthood as a 17-year old struggling through addiction, desperately trying to find a way out, in a more universal way, providing what is essentially a boy's coming-of-age story, much like "Catcher in the Rye" or even "Lord of the Flies."

Reading Lansky is to read a master of prose, someone so in control of his own voice that you immediately understand why it isn't far-fetched to already be comparing him to Burroughs, Baldwin and Salinger.

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## **Greg Kearney says**

Rich white kid does drugs and has lots of sex, then goes to rehab. How fresh! What a crucial new voice! Competent on a sentence-to-sentence basis, otherwise completely unnecessary. And that pompous prologue that begins "For many years after it was over...", like being a party boy is akin to running barefoot from marauding Cossacks! Ugh.

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## **Alex Strout says**

This memoir isn't as fascinating and brutally hilarious as *Running with Scissors* or as lyrically poetic as *Mary Karr*, but it is compulsively readable and a good first effort for a young writer.

I applaud Lansky for completely shedding any sort of ego to honestly tell his story. It's not easy to tell the world exactly how you were when you were 17 years old. Teenagers by nature are obnoxious and self centered and I wouldn't want to write about what I said and did at that age. But he fully commits to tell how he behaved and what his situation was that led to his addictions and recovery.

I felt as if I was on this journey with him, and it was heartbreaking at times. And while he does end up taking full responsibility for his actions, I do feel a lot of the blame for his issues should be assigned to his parents. What father leaves a noticeably troubled 17 year old boy unattended, ignored, and virtually alone in NYC?

This was a crazy, funny, sad, redemptive ride and I'm surprised (and impressed and happy) Lansky made it out alive. And he seems to be doing really well now as an entertainment reporter, so good for you Sam!

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