

Stitches: A Memoir

By David Small

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David Small, a best-selling and highly regarded children's book illustrator, comes forward with this unflinching graphic memoir. Remarkable and intensely dramatic, *Stitches* tells the story of a fourteen-year-old boy who awakes one day from a supposedly harmless operation to discover that he has been transformed into a virtual mute—a vocal cord removed, his throat slashed and stitched together like a bloody boot. From horror to hope, Small proceeds to graphically portray an almost unbelievable descent into adolescent hell and the difficult road to physical, emotional, and artistic recovery.

A National Book Award finalist; winner of the ALA's Alex Award; a #1 *New York Times* graphic bestseller; *Publishers Weekly* and *Washington Post* Top Ten Books of the Year, *Los Angeles Times* Favorite Book, ALA Great Graphic Novels, *Booklist* Editors Choice Award, Huffington Post Great Books of 2009, *Kirkus Reviews* Best of 2009, *Village Voice* Best Graphic Novel, finalist for two 2010 Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards (Best Writer/Artist: Nonfiction; Best Reality-Based Work). Illustrated throughout

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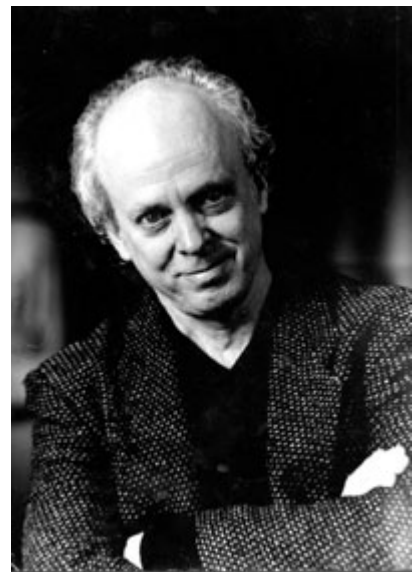
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best of the Month, September 2009: Reading *Stitches* may feel unexpectedly familiar. Not in the details of its story--which is David Small's harrowing account of growing up under the watchless eyes of parents who gave him cancer (his radiologist father subjected him to unscrupulous x-rays for minor ailments) and let it develop untreated for years--but in delicate glimpses of the author's child's-eye view, sketched most often with no words at all. Early memories (and difficult ones, too) often seem less like words than pictures we play back to ourselves. That is what's recognizable and, somehow, ultimately delightful in the midst of this deeply sad story: it reminds us of our memories, not just what they are, but what they look like. In every drawing, David Small shows us moments both real and imagined—some that are guileless and funny and wonderfully sweet, many others that are dark and fearful—that unveil a very talented artist, *stitches* and all. -
-Anne Bartholomew

Amazon Exclusive: David Small on *Stitches*



Amazon.com: *Stitches* is a hard story to tell. What inspired you ultimately to write it?

David Small: I needed a direct confrontation with my past. It wasn't easy, but I was ready to do it, so the work--though it was very difficult--felt rewarding, even exhilarating at times.

Now that it's become a book it seems so complete, so seamless, and--looking at it now--it seems as if it simply fell out onto the page. In reality it was like herding cats for three solid years, especially after the book was under contract and I was really committed to doing it. But deadlines are great energizers. (So, I should add, are the faith of a great editor, a great agent, and a great wife. I am lucky. I have all three.)

Amazon.com: "Graphic novel" is a form that now encompasses all kinds of storytelling, fictional and factual. As an artist, how would you compare reading pictures vs. words? What might your story lose (or

gain) if you told it without pictures?

David Small: I like to say that images get straight inside us, bypassing all the guard towers. You often go to the movies and see people with tears streaming down their cheeks, but you don't see this in libraries, not in my experience at least.

I know now that the graphic form was the only way my memoir could have been told. First of all, drawing is my most fluent means of expression. Secondly, it's a story about being voiceless. It demanded a visual treatment because it involved so much of that guessing game we played in our family, of trying to figure out why someone was mad at us--someone who refused to communicate by any other means than slamming things around. If told in words--even if I could have--the story would have lost that visceral impact.

Amazon.com: Do you read a lot of graphic novels? Are there artists you'd recommend for fans of this genre?

David Small: I've read enough to know that the percentage of really good works in that medium is as small as in any other. For decades I've known and admired the work of Lynd Ward (*God's Man*, *The Silver Pony*), a pioneer of the form. Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Craig Thompson's *Blankets* were moving and very pure. Recently I was impressed by Josh Neufeld's *A.D.: New Orleans after the Deluge*.

A lot of the living artists I admire are European: Blutch, Sylvain Chomet, Winchluss, Frederik Peeters, Nicholas de Crécy, and Gipi are my favorites.

Amazon.com: We're always curious to know more about what authors like to read. Are there any you'd say who have influenced your own approach to writing?

David Small: I frequently go back to Chekov's stories and to the short works of Henry James and Thomas Mann. John Cheever moves me tremendously.

Since I am a visual artist, the most serious influences came from other artists. I used to get totally infected by contact with any artist whose work I admired. So, for a while, in college, I thought I was, among others, Daumier, Rembrandt, Egon Schiele and Kathe Kollwitz. I would drown myself in their ways of seeing the world, to the point that I sometimes wondered if I would ever have a style of my own.

Amazon.com: One of my favorite scenes in the book begins on p. 62, where you dive into your drawing, Alice in Wonderland-style. It struck me as a cherished fantasy. What scenes might you single out as your favorites?

David Small: I like that one also. I'm glad that you equate it with Alice, because the parallel is certainly there. In fact, though, I intended something truer to my own experience, growing up surrounded by x-rays. At six I knew that x-rays were pictures of the secret places inside us. I imagined myself going down into those shadowy places and finding--what? I don't know. A better world, I suppose. That is what I had in mind but, as I said, I have no problem at all with the Alice reference.

The party scene--where my entire adolescent social life gets summed up in a one-page image--also seems to work well. I'm happy with all the dream sequences. The 9-page "rain" sequence, in which the landscape is used as a metaphor for a state of mind, came out as I wanted it.

Amazon.com: The illustrations early in the story on pp 22-23--rendered again, in part, towards the end of the book on pp 290-91--are at once tender and terrifying, and they look remarkably different than most of the other panels that flow between them. Can you talk more about your approach to drawing this scene?

David Small: I tried to draw it the way it felt: that is, being an infant under all that hovering, humming x-ray machinery. If I recall correctly, I put an emphasis on the child's eyes looking around him at the dials, gauges, dangling cords and the blank walls of the machines. Later, the infant's gaze is coupled with the eyes of the young man who revisits the scene in his memory. Then, as the past and present fuse together, comes a shock of revelation. He realizes that what happened to him as an infant has now reached out and shaped--perhaps even ruined--his future. The infant's face and the young man's face converge into one.

Amazon.com: You've illustrated an award-winning roster of children's books. How did writing *Stitches* impact your style of drawing? Were there elements that took more iterations than others?

David Small: I took the advice of artist Mark Siegel, an old hand at graphic novels who--although his style is entirely different from mine--recommended that I develop a way of drawing that is more like handwriting than regular drawing. "Otherwise," he said, "the whole process will drive you insane." I leapt on this piece of advice because it sounded so right and because it was a direction I'd been moving toward anyway, especially in my sketchbooks. This was a very different effort from my picture book work.

Amazon.com: I'm curious which section of the book you found yourself writing first. Did you find that drawing one part would help you to construct other scenes?

David Small: The scenes in the empty hospital--the elevator ride and so forth--were my strongest childhood memories. Of that whole sequence, the little fetus in the jar stood out most clearly in my mind. I found, as I started drawing, that by some natural-seeming process of visual mnemonics, I could make connections from one thing to another. Then, gradually, whole scenes and episodes would flood back. To put it a simpler way: when I could "see"--that is, draw--the room, and had it all furnished again, the actors (the ghosts) would move in and begin saying their lines. I found all that really quite remarkable.

Amazon.com: Memoirists are often asked questions about memories--the tools of their trade, in a way--but do you think memories tell the whole story?

David Small: No. They are only your memories. The other people there saw it through their own lens. It's Rashomon. Pure truth doesn't exist. We shouldn't insist on it, and we should always be willing to bend.

Amazon.com: The afterword to *Stitches* was unexpected, but I found I appreciated the visual reference points for you, and for your mother and father. Why did you feel this was important to include?

David Small: I'm glad you found them helpful. I always do, too, when I'm reading about the lives of others; I go to the photographs, maybe as a way of affirming the descriptive skills of the writer, but also to meet the subjects in a more concrete way. Now you've got me thinking. Maybe I was showing off. It was like saying, "Here! Look! I'm so certain I've done my job well that I'm not afraid to show you these people, whom I've been drawing for 300 pages." Mainly, though, it seemed like the right and fair thing to do.

Amazon.com: Reviews of *Stitches* seem to swivel on the question of whether the book is redemptive or cathartic. What do you think? Did you write it with any expectation of how you'd feel afterwards?

David Small: Seeing my early life again from the perspective of an adult, I came to know my family members as fellow human beings. I understood their drives. This broke the spell they had over me. It freed me of their influence. I'd had enough, frankly, of living and thinking the way they had taught me to think and behave.

Did I expect that this would happen? No. I had no expectations, only the need to do it.

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In this profound and moving memoir, Small, an award-winning children's book illustrator, uses his drawings to depict the consciousness of a young boy. The story starts when the narrator is six years old and follows him into adulthood, with most of the story spent during his early adolescence. The youngest member of a silent and unhappy family, David is subjected to repeated x-rays to monitor sinus problems. When he develops cancer as a result of this procedure, he is operated on without being told what is wrong with him. The operation results in the loss of his voice, cutting him off even further from the world around him. Small's black and white pen and ink drawings are endlessly perceptive as they portray the layering of dream and imagination onto the real-life experiences of the young boy. Small's intuitive morphing of images, as with the terrible postsurgery scar on the main character's throat that becomes a dark staircase climbed by his mother, provide deep emotional echoes. Some understanding is gained as family secrets are unearthed, but for the most part David fends for himself in a family that is uncommunicative to a truly ghastly degree. Small tells his story with haunting subtlety and power. (*Sept.*)

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From School Library Journal

Starred Review. Grade 10 Up—Small is best known for his picture-book illustration. Here he tells the decidedly grim but far from unique story of his own childhood. Many teens will identify with the rigors of growing up in a household of angry silences, selfish parents, feelings of personal weakness, and secret lives. Small shows himself to be an excellent storyteller here, developing the cast of characters as they appeared to him during this period of his life, while ending with the reminder that his parents and brother probably had very different takes on these same events. The title derives from throat surgery Small underwent at 14, which left him, for several years, literally voiceless. Both the visual and rhetorical metaphors throughout will have high appeal to teen sensibilities. The shaded artwork, composed mostly of ink washes, is both evocative and beautifully detailed. A fine example of the growing genre of graphic-novel memoirs.—*Francisca Goldsmith, Halifax Public Libraries, Nova Scotia* END

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Crystal Sanchez:

What do you think about book? It is just for students as they are still students or it for all people in the world, exactly what the best subject for that? Simply you can be answered for that concern above. Every person has different personality and hobby for each and every other. Don't to be compelled someone or something that they don't want do that. You must know how great in addition to important the book *Stitches: A Memoir*. All type of book can you see on many options. You can look for the internet resources or other social media.

Maurice Miller:

Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also turn into a life style. This reading habit give you lot of advantages. The benefits you got of course the knowledge your information inside the book that improve your knowledge and information. The knowledge you get based on what kind of guide you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with education books but if you want sense happy read one together with theme for entertaining such as comic or novel. Often the *Stitches: A Memoir* is kind

of reserve which is giving the reader unforeseen experience.

Cari Sexton:

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information currently can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a expertise or any news even a problem. What people must be consider whenever those information which is inside former life are challenging be find than now's taking seriously which one works to believe or which one often the resource are convinced. If you receive the unstable resource then you understand it as your main information it will have huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen within you if you take Stitches: A Memoir as the daily resource information.

Kenneth Garrison:

Reading a guide tends to be new life style on this era globalization. With looking at you can get a lot of information that could give you benefit in your life. Along with book everyone in this world can share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire their reader with their story or perhaps their experience. Not only the storyplot that share in the books. But also they write about the data about something that you need example of this. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your children, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors on earth always try to improve their proficiency in writing, they also doing some investigation before they write to their book. One of them is this Stitches: A Memoir.

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