

15 Minutes

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The Painful Journey Of Al Capone's Grandson

By Ivor Davis

WHEN he was just 13 Chris Knight learned a shocking family secret: He was the grandson of one of the most notorious mobsters in American history.

"After my Dad died a close friend of his told me, 'Al Capone was your grandfather.'"

"Who's Al Capone?" the confused teenager responded.

Knight is now 36, and a successful Boston MBA and accountant. But from the moment his teenage self confronted the amazing family secret, his life was turned upside down as he embarked on a long, personal odyssey to uncover his father's mysterious background—and the truth behind his legendary grandfather.

The result of that search is a soul baring book: [Son of Scarface—a Memoir by the Grandson of Al Capone](#), just published by New Era Publishing (295 pages, soft cover, \$18.95 [Amazon.com Price: \\$12.89](#)).

Speaking from his home in Boston, Knight gave details of his painful search digging deep into the skeletons deliberately buried in his family's closet.

Chris traces a life of turmoil to the day his father Bill Knight took him on vacation. On the first day of his holiday he died in his son's arms.

"It was very traumatic," Chris recalls, "I held his hand, told him I loved him—he had a major stroke and died instantly."

In hindsight, Chris realizes his father had always had a shadowy past.

"He'd disappear for long periods leaving me and my sister with my mother who physically and



Chris Knight

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emotionally abused us. We knew he was a long distance truck driver—but everything else was very mysterious."



"After the funeral," says Chris, "I just felt this burning desire to find out more. So I went through his personal phone book, and began calling people who were complete strangers to me."

Most of the people he called unceremoniously hung up on him. But eventually he hit pay dirt.

"I reached a guy named Thor who said he knew my dad well. 'Who was my dad?' I asked him. There was a long silence, then Thor said, 'Your father was the son of Al Capone. Look him up.'"

At the time, Chris, shocked by his dad's death did not have the means, emotional or otherwise, to piece together his family's history. But the mystery nagged for years.

"I once asked my mother but she said we couldn't talk about it to anyone She was angry that I kept asking. She said my father didn't want us to know the truth."

Chris' father had always said his real parents were killed in a plane crash. He had been brought up thereafter by foster parents on a rural farm. But he also had vague memories of his father talking about a grand house with palm trees and big parties.

Chris hired a genealogist and private investigator. It turned out that the Roaring Twenties hoodlum may have impregnated a woman who was not his official wife—and it was she who gave birth to an illegitimate son—Chris' father.

The way was littered with strange though circumstantial evidence—a strange woman who suddenly showed up to care for Chris and his sister after his flighty mother left them alone while she went off partying in Europe. Who sent the woman and who was paying her?

Rent that was mysteriously paid for Chris' grandmother when she was broke. Schooling that was provided for his father so that he would have training for a profession after his wartime service.

But there was nothing proven, nothing that would satisfy Chris' desperate need to know. "It was a painful journey with many sleepless nights; part of it was reliving the trauma that I and my sister had gone through at the hands of our mother."

While actors including Paul Muni, Rod Steiger, Al Pacino and Robert De Niro in the hit 1987 movie *The Untouchables* portrayed Capone, Chris says finding his own story wasn't as easy as simply watching a movie.

"I had to painstakingly go through the land of Al Capone and it was weird. Here you are dealing with one of the most notorious mob bosses and killers in American history—and even those people who are still alive don't want to talk about it. It's as if they believe Capone will come back out of the grave and get them."

However difficult and unnerving it might be to find your grandfather was a mass killer, Knight says the search was necessary for his own sanity and to understand himself.

"It was a cleansing thing. I felt that in order to survive I had to let the demons out."

Though the search did not result with anything definite enough to take to a court of law, Knight says ironically it resulted in an improved relationship and reconciliation of sorts over the past Christmas with his 66-year-old mother who lives in New Jersey.

"For years we never spoke. But we are trying to get close and finally last Christmas she broke down and cried. She said she's sorry that I and my sister had to live this fictional charade where most of what she told us about our father was lies."

Wright says in writing the book he spoke to other Capone family members who had changed their identities and buried their true pasts. "They have all been very kind and supportive of me. They identified with the pain I've been through."

Ironically, in late January Chris rented his mobster grandfather's palatial old waterfront estate in Florida for a party to launch his memoir.

Some proceeds from the sale of the book will be turned over to the Boys and Girls Club of America.

So what does he think now of that Chicago hood who died of syphilis in 1947 at the age of 48 after serving a long prison term on Alcatraz Island for tax evasion?

"It was a different time and a different era so how can I try to judge him," he says.

Another irony touched upon in the book is the fact that Chris lives an openly gay life and questions whether his macho grandfather might have been a closeted gay.

"I read about his mannerisms and behavior and in doing so I felt there were a lot of similarities between him and me. We even look alike. There were some rumors that he might have been a closet gay because his voice was soft—almost at times like a little girl. So it made me think—maybe he had a gay gene and I got it. So my gayness is nature not nurture."

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Art Of The Ages

Reviews by Tim Boxer

BREATH TAKING! Fabulous! Astounding! That was my reaction when I gazed at page after page of [30,000 Years of Art](#). Starting with the first offering, a lion man sculpture in Germany c. 28000 BCE, on through the millennia with representative works of cave art in France, Spain, Australia and Argentina to Terracotta figurines in Greece, c.6000, and Turkey, c.5750 BCE, through Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, China, Syria, Mexico, Thailand, and many other countries, century after century. Turning page after page is a mind-shattering experience of humankind's rich creativity from prehistoric times to our current offerings of Wind Combs, a steel sculpture of Late



Modernism in Spain, 1977, to the last page, which depicts James Turrell's unfinished Land Art in Painted Desert, Arizona, that he started in 1977. This book with its 1,072 oversized pages consisting of 1,000 great works belongs on your coffee table (make sure it has sturdy legs to display this 13-pound tome). Phaidon Press, \$49.95 [Amazon.com Price: \\$32.97](#)

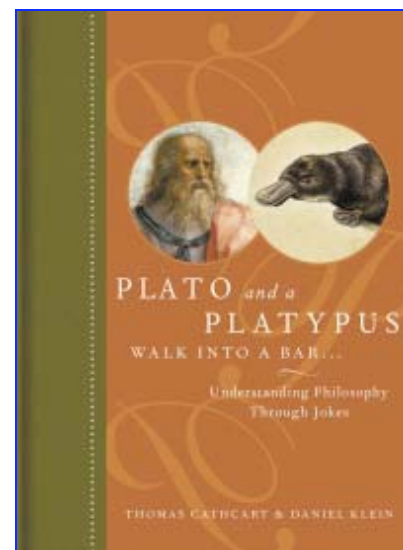


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Teaching Philosophy

WISH the required texts of my philosophy course at Northwestern had been as witty and sharp as [Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar](#). This is the funniest book on philosophy I've ever seen.

Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein pursued the usual careers after majoring in philosophy at Harvard: Cathcart worked with street gangs in Chicago and dropped in and out of various divinity schools and Klein wrote jokes for comedians and designed stunts for *Candid Camera*. They explain the basics of metaphysics, logic, epistemology, ethics and even relativity in such a clear and concise manner that it's a joy to delve into these esoteric domains again.



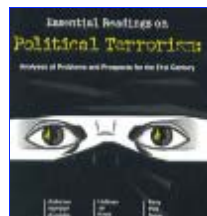
Speaking of relativity, Dimitri says, "So, Tasso, you seem to be one of those guys who thinks there is no absolute truth, that all truth is relative." Tasso says, "Right." Dimitri continues, "Are you sure of that?" Tasso insists, "Absolutely."

That's how the authors teach philosophy – with irreverent humor and lots of jokes to illustrate a point. whether explaining existentialism or the subject of language. Abrams Image, 208 pages, illustrated, \$18.95 [Amazon.com Price: \\$12.89](#) (and well worth it).

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Exploring The Conflict

WHAT is the western world up against? A clash of civilizations? Or just streams of extremist bands of religious fanatics and death squads aiming human torpedoes at unsuspecting people and nations – and fellow countrymen! – in an effort to impose their radical narrow-minded desert culture on everyone else in the world? Scholars and journalists have been pounding on their keyboards trying to make sense of all the terror and horror that has ushered in the 21st century.



[Essential Readings on Political Terrorism](#), adds to the explosion (pun intended) of books and magazine articles on the nature of the conflict that threatens the West. Edited by Harvey W. Kushner, chair of the department of criminal justice and security administration at Long Island University in Brookville, NY, this volume consists of 23 contributions ranging from definitions of "terrorism" to discussions of state terrorism and media terrorism. Suicide as a



form of religious devotion has a long history, harking back to 1090-1275 when a Shiite sect known as the Assassins dispatched members, endowed with courage in the form of hashish, on missions of political assassination using only a dagger, to make sure that he would not be able to survive. (used & new available from \$6.44 at [Amazon.com](#))

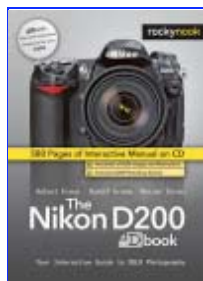
▶ [America Alone](#) by columnist Mark Steyn is a frightening read. Many observers, among them the Pope's secretary, have warned of the Islamization of Europe. Steyn takes it step further: it's the end of the world as we know it due to the plague of Islamism and the crippling effects of feeble politicians. Not to mention that falling birth rate in Europe (with "deathbed birth statistics"), leading to an Islamist majority on the continent. Steyn goes on to show how things have changed all over. In the past when our forefathers immigrated, they happily adjusted to their new environment. Today multiculturalism is forcing society to bend to immigrant sensibilities and accommodate the newcomers by changing our culture to suit the newcomers. It has come to this: we are assimilating with the immigrants, instead of the other way around. Regnery, 214 pages, \$27.95 [Amazon.com Price: \\$18.45](#))

▶ [The Palestinian People: A History](#) purports to contradict Golda Meir's declaration that there is no such historical creation as a Palestinian nation. Baruch Kimmerling, former sociology professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Joel S. Migdal, international studies professor at the University of Washington, maintain that the Palestinian people originated in the area long before modern political Zionism arose. In fact, the local Arabs, "Palestinians," revolted against Egyptian rule in 1834, British mandatory rule in 1936-39, and the Intifada against Israel in 1987. (Harvard University Press, softcover, 568 pages, [Amazon.com Price: \\$19.50](#))



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Page Turners

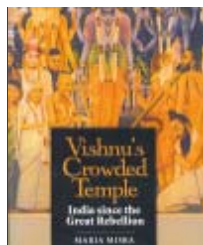


▶ [The Nikon D200 Dbook](#) is another in a series of interactive guidebook on Nikon digital cameras. With 580 digital pages in Acrobat format, you'll learn about the camera than any user's manual offers. This is the perfect introduction to the Nikon system for any amateur or semi-pro photographer could want. Keep the disc in your computer, but take the handy booklet with you on the road, packed as it is with overviews of the camera and menu options. This is the best way to get acquainted with your digital Nikon. Rocky Nook, \$44.95 [Amazon.com Price: \\$29.67](#))

▶ [iPod: The Missing Manual](#) is a well-written book of instructions. Knowing that many manuals are so incomprehensible, due to language or content, I found this book a delight for its clarity and ease. Maybe that's due to the authors. Both J.D. Biersdorfer and David Pogue are excellent writers on computers and tech issues for *The New York Times*. You need this book to discover all the great things an iPod can do and where to find its secret features because, the authors say, the tiny pamphlet that comes with the iPod "is skimpy in the extreme." O'Reilly, softcover, 278 pages, \$19.99 [Amazon.com Price: \\$13.59](#))



▶ [Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India Since the Great Rebellion](#) is an extensive



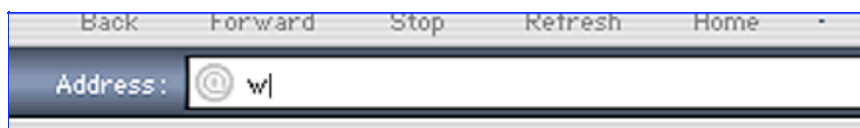
narrative of modern India on this 60th anniversary of nationhood. Maria Misra, history lecturer at Oxford University, tries to show "how India has developed its own peculiar form of modernity, the most striking feature of which is its highly atomized, fragmented and diverse citizenry." A tall order, but she succeeds admirably. Yale University Press, soft cover, 494 pages, \$35.00 [Amazon.com](#) **Price: \$23.10**)

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