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# The Lifespan Of A Fact

The Lifespan  
of a Fact.

John D'Agata,  
author.

Jim Fingal,  
fact-checker.

"A fascinating and dramatic power struggle over the intriguing question of what nonfiction should, or can, be." —Lydia Davis



## Synopsis

Named a top 10 Best Book of 2012 by Slate.com An innovative essayist and his fact-checker do battle about the use of truth and the definition of nonfiction. How negotiable is a fact in nonfiction? In 2003, an essay by John D'Agata was rejected by the magazine that commissioned it due to factual inaccuracies. That essay—which eventually became the foundation of D'Agata's critically acclaimed *About a Mountain*—was accepted by another magazine, *The Believer*, but not before they handed it to their own fact-checker, Jim Fingal. What resulted from that assignment was seven years of arguments, negotiations, and revisions as D'Agata and Fingal struggled to navigate the boundaries of literary nonfiction. This book reproduces D'Agata's essay, along with D'Agata and Fingal's extensive correspondence. What emerges is a brilliant and eye-opening meditation on the relationship between truth and accuracy and a penetrating conversation about whether it is appropriate for a writer to substitute one for the other. Two-color throughout

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“...[H]ere is the genius of this little book, for as it progresses, D'Agata and Fingal turn everything around on us, until even our most basic assumptions are left unclear. Who says writers owe readers anything? Or that genre, such as it is, is a valid lens through which to consider literary work? ...[T]he book is “an enactment of the experience of trying to find meaning”—a vivid and reflective meditation on the nature of nonfiction as literary art.” — David L. Ulin, *L.A. Times* “Very apropos in our era of spruced-up autobiography and fabricated reporting, this is a whip-smart, mordantly

funny, thought-provoking rumination on journalistic responsibility and literary license.â • - Publishers Weeklyâ œA fascinating and dramatic power struggle over the intriguing question of what nonfiction should, or can, be.â • - Lydia Davisâ œA singularly important meditation on fact and fiction, the imagination and life, fidelity and freedom. Provocative, maddening, and compulsively readable, The Lifespan of a Fact pulses through a forest of detail to illuminate high-stakes, age-old questions about art and ethicsâ • questions to which the book (blessedly!) provides no easy answers.â • - Maggie Nelsonâ œ...The Lifespan of a Fact... is less a book than a knock-down, drag-out fight between two tenacious combatants, over questions of truth, belief, history, myth, memory and forgetting.â • - Jennifer McDonald, New York Times Book Reviewâ œA riveting essay delving into the arcane yet entertaining debate within the writing community over the relationship between truth and accuracy when writing creative nonfiction....â • - Kirkus Reviewsâ œ...Thus begins the alternately absorbing and infuriating exercise that is the book The Lifespan of a Fact, a Talmudically arranged account of the conflict between Jim Fingal, zealous checker, and John Dâ™Agata, nonfiction fabulist, which began in 2005 and resulted in this collaboration.â • - Gideon Lewis-Kraus, New York Times Magazineâ œIf you like compelling, emotional stories set in wild, business-friendly locales, this book delivers.â • - Daniel Roberts, Fortune Magazine

John Dâ™Agata is the author of *About a Mountain*, *Halls of Fame* and editor of *The Next American Essay* and *The Lost Origins of the Essay*. He teaches creative writing at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, where he lives. Jim Fingal is now a software engineer and writer in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

A surprisingly engaging book that bares uncomfortable truths about journalism and what can be stated as fact. The exchanges between Fingal the Fact Checker and D'Agata the Tale Spinner are always entertaining and sometimes hilarious. D'Agata deserves a lot of credit for letting this book come to light because throughout it he seems to have little regard for facts, changing them at will. "Never let the facts get in the way of a good story," they used to say in journalism school. D'Agata follows this creed but is caught with his pants down.

I can't decide if this little satire serves as a thought provoking exercise on what is knowable OR goes too far and winds up slyly justifying, and yet apologizing for, sloppy writing and thinking. I see some profs are using it in their journalism classes. Let's hope they are guiding the classroom discussions. Without guidance I could see some youngsters taking this too literally as a get out of

jail free card.

If you don't find this book interesting, you're boring. There are so many levels - so many opportunities to question what you believe and why you believe it. And isn't that why we read?

Read it for a class, would not have read it otherwise. Mixed feelings since the point was to show the real back and forth between a factchecker and a writer, but it seems that the dialogue itself was edited, which brings up how real it is. I got the point after 5-10 pages and wasn't sure why it kept going after that

The way the book is organized is not like a normal book. The center of the page has a famous essay by D'Agada and the text outside the center is the conversation between d'Agada and the fact checker. I we were told to read the center text first (essay) then we started reading the outer text after knowing what the essay was. The book came in on time, in new condition.

Product as described. Interesting read.

I got this book as a requirement for my journalism class, and it's actually a remarkably written book. It's written in a very different format, but I loved it

Conceptually "wonderful, admirable even. But execution wise, well, it welcomes repetitious. A little too inside baseball for most, as an editor/writer I enjoyed it to a point. Bravo. A first class attempt.

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