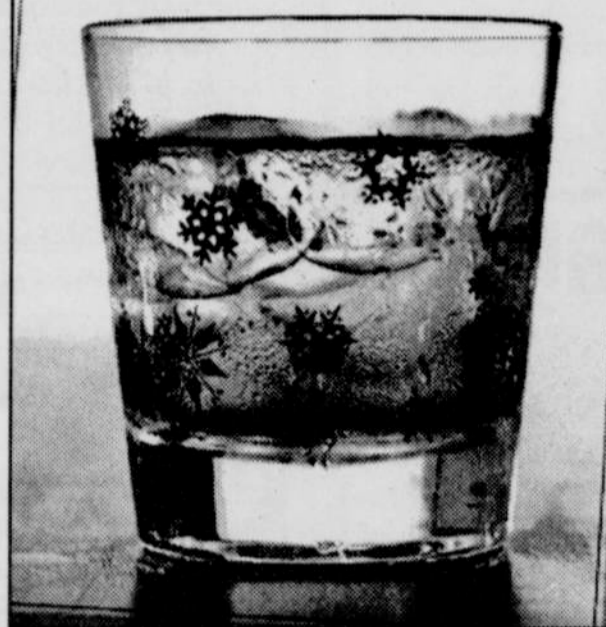


HOLIDAYS ON ICE
DAVID SEDARIS



"For me, France was never a specific, premeditated destination," he writes. "I wound up in Normandy the same way my mother wound up in North Carolina—you meet a guy, relinquish a tiny bit of control, and the next thing you know, you're eating a different part of the pig."

The guy Sedaris met is Hugh Hamrick, a painter who owned a home in France; now, they have places in Normandy, Paris and New York.

The move also had to do with another love: smoking. "I think because I've never driven a car—I've never polluted the air that way—I should be allowed to smoke wherever I want to," he asserts. But the majority of the U.S. public feels otherwise, so the man who believes nicotine cured his Tourette's-like tics (read *Naked* for details) says he finds France "a smoker's paradise."

Perhaps the primary reason for the move, however, was Sedaris' love of a challenge. "I didn't care where Hemingway drank or Alice B. Toklas had her mustache trimmed," he writes.

"Real life isn't a book tour. All those people lined up saying how much they love you—that's not going to give you anything to write about."

"What I found appealing in life abroad was the inevitable sense of helplessness it would inspire."

Most of Sedaris' stories revolve around his failures in absurd situations, so his undeniable success presents a challenge of a different kind for someone who typically portrays himself as an underdog. "Real life isn't a book tour," he says. "All those people lined up saying how much they love you—that's not going to give you anything to write about."

Having worked as a house cleaner until 1997, when *Naked* was published, Sedaris says he's "never quite adjusted to life without a job, and now I don't have working papers." He continues: "I know so many people whose goal is to do nothing but write, and that never meant anything to me.... There's nothing so good

about writing full time. It just means that your whole life is based on a paragraph. If you have to go to work, then at least you have a feeling of accomplishment." So Sedaris puts his attention toward various accomplishments outside of writing, be it taxidermy, crossword puzzles or his latest obsession, sit-ups.

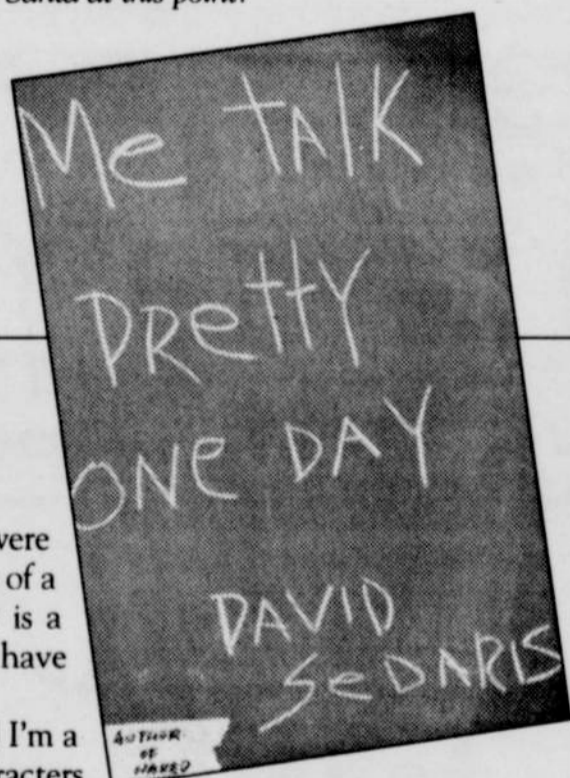
"I never thought I'd turn into the kind of person I always used to make fun of, but I'm obsessed now with doing 600 sit-ups a day," he says, sounding both proud and embarrassed. "I sometimes get up at 5 o'clock so I can do them."

After noticing he was having difficulty sucking his stomach in and reading out loud at the same time, Sedaris lost 23 pounds by riding his bike 20 miles a day, lopping 3 inches off his waist.

But it turned out the rock-hard abs he worked so hard to achieve completely repelled his boyfriend, "so it didn't get me anything," he says, "but it's just this little feeling of accomplishment, and I suppose that's all I ever wanted...because that way, if the writing doesn't go well I think, 'Well, I finished all my sit-ups, I rode my bike 20 miles.'"

With hundreds of people storming the doors of bookstores across the country, a movie version of *Me Talk Pretty One Day* being developed by Wayne Wang (director of *The Joy Luck Club* and *Smoke*) and his paperback release topping the bestseller list, I don't think David Sedaris needs to worry too much about the writing not going well. [J]

MARC ACITO writes the monthly humor column "The Gospel According to Marc" and draws the comic strip "The Boys Next Door" but probably won't write about his experiences as a department store Santa at this point.



Excerpts from

Me Talk Pretty One Day

"I met Hugh through a mutual friend. She and I were painting an apartment, and he had offered the use of a 12-foot ladder. Owning a 12-foot ladder in New York is a probable sign of success, as it means you most likely have enough room to store one...."

"In order to get things I want, it helps me to pretend I'm a figure in a daytime drama, a schemer. Soap opera characters make emphatic pronouncements. They ball up their fists and state their goals out loud. 'I will destroy Buchanan Enterprises,' they say. 'Phoebe Wallingford will pay for what she's done to our family.' Walking home with the back half of the 12-foot ladder, I turned to look in the direction of Hugh's loft. 'You will be mine,' I commanded...."

"Hugh's father was a career officer with the U.S. State Department, and every morning a black sedan carried him off to the embassy. I'm told it's not as glamorous as it sounds, but in terms of fun for the entire family, I'm fairly confident that it beats the sack race at the annual IBM picnic...."

"Among my personal highlights is the memory of having my picture taken with Uncle Paul, the legally blind host of a Raleigh children's television show. Among Hugh's is the memory of having his picture taken with Buzz Aldrin on the last leg of the astronaut's world tour. The man who had walked on the moon placed his hand on Hugh's shoulder and offered to sign his autograph book. The man who led Wake County schoolchildren in afternoon song turned at the sound of my voice and asked, 'So what's your name, princess?'"



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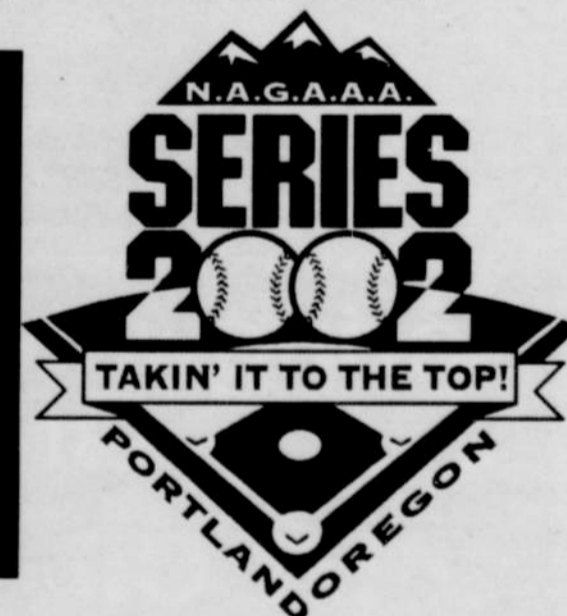
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