



Self-Styled: Chasing Dr. Robert Vernon Spears

Alan C. Logan

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Packed with stunning twists and larger-than-life characters, Self-Styled is a fascinating true crime story.

Alan C. Logan's historical true crime work *Self-Styled* chronicles the strange and scandalous life of a prolific American con artist.

In 1959, Doctor Robert Vernon Spears, one of America's leading naturopaths, was presumed dead when a flight crashed in the Gulf of Mexico. But something was amiss: not only was Spears not on the flight, but his best friend went missing on the same day. As the FBI tried to figure out the nature of Spears's involvement with the doomed aircraft, the careful life that Spears had built for himself fell apart, revealing a story more long reaching and sensational than anyone could have imagined.

The present tense narration makes following the chase feel urgent, though the book's frequent sentence fragments are distracting. Flashbacks to Spears's colorful past reveal the truth—or at least, the truth as it can be known—over the course of the narrative. The revelations come piece by piece, building suspense about Spears's true motives and actions.

The people involved in the mystery are as diverse and bizarre as Spears himself. They include Spears's loving, clueless wife; Al, Spears's missing friend who had a mysterious past of his own; Al's attention-hungry ex-wife; and a reporter who will do anything to secure the scoop of the decade: Spears's confession. Each character is heard through quotes from their letters and interviews, as well as through educated guesses regarding their thoughts and emotions during key moments.

The narrative is interspersed with fascinating glimpses into 1950s Americana that play a role in the story, from popular cars to the inner workings of the underground abortion business. The epilogue outlines Logan's research methods and the rationales behind them, with links to the many references used to piece together Spears's life, including several incidents that investigators missed at the time. Photographs of Spears, his associates, his victims, and his hideouts further bring his world to life.

Many questions remain about Spears and the plane crash that propelled his extraordinary story into the spotlight, and the book does not discuss what happened to the supporting characters after the story's end. Nevertheless, *Self-Styled* is a thorough and satisfying account of both the plane crash and the man accused of causing it. It includes a sense of hope that the mystery of that fateful flight—if not the mystery of the man who might have brought the plane down—may someday be solved.

Packed with stunning twists and larger-than-life characters, *Self-Styled* is the fascinating true crime story of a huckster and the plane crash that exposed his secret life.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (December 11, 2019)

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