

Shrink

David Wolgroch

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1969 a Jewish honor student in the Bronx is a school newspaper editor the son of Holocaust survivors and the newest member of a Puerto Rican extortion gang. A strong inciting sequence puts a sixteen-year-old boy in a dilemma of possible violence. After angering the gang's leader Dave at a neighborhood pizzeria he reduces the bruise-planting consequences by sharp thinking and more importantly by appearing to assimilate. It's a short leap from a call-out challenge to an affinity for Carlos Santana records but the inward identity isn't altered. After the immediate crisis is managed the cleanly demarcated goal is to quit the gang without repercussions. This is best done by brainwashing its tough but insecure leader.

As a memoirist Wolgroch is interested in phenomena of deception and manipulation. Situational ethics on the individual level get a look. "The distinction between caring for someone and exploiting them is precariously fragile." Having found in himself an ability to influence the actions and ideas of others Wolgroch sets wheels to turning which will eventually lead to his vocation as a psychologist. The introduction demonstrates social discomfort that comes with being introduced as a "shrink" at gatherings. There are unwanted mind-reading tests cheesy jibes and a whole truckload of assumptions. There is not a fitting opportunity to mention the good old days of terrorizing shop owners out of "protection" money.

David Wolgroch practices clinical psychology along a shady lane in London England following years in Israel and the United States. His other books are *Cetacean Magic* and *Creation Out of Nothingness: Creatio ex Nihilo* which concerns the effects of the Holocaust on several generations of a family.

This memoir of about novella length uses well-considered pacing decisions to help hold dramatic interest. The setting an urban neighborhood in ethnic transition and the reversed dynamic of an isolated white person operating within a minority group are partly leveraged though readers may wish to have learned more about them from the memoirist's inside vantage. *Shrink* is fleshed out with brief passages which the reader may initially identify as digressions to irrelevant though interesting historical topics but then find they tie back to the narrative illustrating a principle in an original way. For example the Vietnam War's birthdate-based draft shows the effects of arbitrary reallocation of life-chances on the psyches of military-age males.

Teen readers are a natural target for this story of formation but the writing offers grist for adult minds also. The world is brimming with armchair psychoanalysts. "Indeed we are all amateur scientists when faced with the challenge of understanding the curious behavior of others..."

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