



Dear Diary

Lesley Arfin , Chloë Sevigny (Introduction)

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A collection of a girl's funniest diary entries from 12 to 25 years old. She updates each entry by tracking down the people involved and asking awkward questions like, "Do you remember when I tried to beat you up?" Sometimes old friends apologize. Sometimes they become new enemies. No matter who she talks to about the days we all discovered sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll, one thing becomes abundantly clear: Boys are totally immature.

"Here's your chance to have all the benefits of a tortured adolescence without the shitty childhood. Congradulations!"

—Sarah Silverman

Dear Diary Details

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From Reader Review Dear Diary for online ebook

Isabela Quintero says

an experiment not a book

Kelly says

I was looking through the bookstore purchasing materials for my vacation (rare treat to self) when this book on display jumped out at me. Recommendations on the back made it seem like it would be enjoyable, funny, and a speedy read.

Well it was speedy.

In this book Arfin takes diary entries from elementary school up to the present and pokes fun at them. She also goes back to talk to people she wrote about to find out if they're still jerks or whether they've mended their ways.

The problem is that Arfin seems like a bigger jerk than those she claims tortured her in school. She's petty and vindictive and isn't someone that I would particularly want to know. While a book could still work under these conditions, this one doesn't. Arfin wants to appeal to reader nostalgia by recalling the awkwardness of youth, but with a glut of memoirs on the market, it should contain some insight into human nature. Instead of exploring her own faults and reasons for her descent into drug abuse, her defenses are raised so high that readers can see an insecurity that the author herself won't admit exists. By the end of the book, I found the author's picture on the back cover was the perfect capper. She is wearing sunglasses and blowing bubble gum to obscure what she looks like, her small arms tossed up in a faux gangster pose.

Colleen says

self-indulgent to say the least.

i found a lot of it rather boring and the quality of writing was poor. [does she really think it's okay to publish a book using abbreviated forms of words such as "btw" and "jk?"-i get it. and it makes me embarrassed for this aging hipster.]

i won't say that i disliked it though. i'm a pop-culturist and this is pop-culture at it's best. the author is only a few years older than me so it was nice little trip down memory lane. a fun, quick read but i don't think it will save any lives.

Pilouetta says

maybe it's just me. maybe we got off to a bad start when she said she was punk in 1993 at the age of 14 (i thought it DIED when i was 15 in 1983). and maybe i can't relate to a 27 year old whose parents supported her so she could go to hampshire college, and become a heroin addict. i found her book boring and self indulgent which, i think, is exactly what a diary is, interesting to arfin and her friends ONLY. her fucking isn't that hot, her writing is ... well, she's no anais nin. her best line: being sad is like wanting to be nothing at all. of course, this follows: i wanted to take a train around the country and meet people and be a hippie. enough said.

courtney says

i have a "thing" for diary-type books. either real or fictionalized, even if they are schlocky airport fare i can never say no. luckily, this book isn't - lesley writes this memoir that is half diary entries from her personal journals and half commentary on those entries and where she was in her life when she wrote them like a letter to an old friend from back home. it helps that she has led an interesting and adventurous life thus far - and dear diary reflects that in its smart yet snarky recollections of wasted youth. did you ever want to ask that snotty girl in grade school who treated you like shit all the time what her deal was? well, lesley did. read about it here, then stalk her online like i do.

Lila Dobbs says

my cuz wrote this !

Norae Lebowski says

Este libro es tan insoportable como su narradora, que se dedica a recordar entradas de su diario desde que era adolescente hasta que llega a la adultez y luego «reflexionar» sobre las anécdotas, así como entrevistar muy de pasada y sin ninguna relevancia a las personas a las que hace referencia en ellas. Vamos, que es una oda a mira lo guay y rebelde que he sido en mi juventud y probablemente sea una lectura interesante para ella misma y poco más. Una absoluta pérdida de tiempo que solo muestra a una persona frívola, vacía, superficial, que no ha madurado un ápice en los supuestos años que hay de diferencia entre las entradas de diario y las reflexiones «adultas». Mantiene una actitud de canallita durante toda la narración que echa para atrás y además no se muestra ni siquiera crítica o consecuente con algunos aspectos que podrían ser interesantes como la sexualidad, la educación, el consumo de drogas, etc.

Phyllis says

Do people still hate Lesley Arfin? This was a pretty tedious read, and the only thing I liked about it was the Vanessa Davis illustrations. I just don't think there's any way you can make your teenage diary interesting, even with lengthy annotations and interviews with former friends. Sometimes there's tiny sparks of self-awareness and legit insight, but they're quickly extinguished by the endless sludge tide of dissecting stupid fights the author had when she was 16 years old. Why do so many writers who live in New York City think every single thing they say and do, no matter how mundane it is, is somehow compelling because they live in

New York City?

There's a lot of talk about how she hopes this book will help creative, neurotic young women avoid her mistakes, but since a lot of what she writes is cloaked in multiple artichoke layers of irony, I have no idea if she was being sarcastic or not.

Also, I irrationally hate the cover photo because Richard Kern is a hack and I wish aliens would abduct him and take him back to their home planet for study.

Valerie says

ah gahd heroin heroin heroin. being a girl. feeling like shit. terrible horrible wonderful. yes yes yes.

i stayed up all night reading this horrible shit. i'm tired and pissed and i want drugs now. it's really good.

i've been keeping diaries as long as this chick and mine are way more interesting. way.

Amelia says

I came across this book at a really cool bookstore in Baltimore where John Waters apparently picks up his fan mail. I'd not heard of Lesley Arfin, but apparently she writes for Rookie and I adore Rookie and the aforementioned bookstore was also selling copies of Rookie Yearbook One.

So I said, "What the hell" and decided to read it.

And what a goddamned waste of time it was.

Maybe I'm missing something. Maybe I'm boring. Maybe I had the world's most uneventful adolescence. But this book pissed me off. Literally all I got out of it was "I'm a rich white girl whose parents cover all my bills so I can go to Hampshire College and do all kinds of drugs. And even though I completely fuck up consistently, I somehow manage to land an internship with a magazine and write stuff in New York City and ugh why doesn't anyone like me?"

Like, holy damn privilege.

She made an effort, in the afterward, to explain her point in publishing this diary, but it really didn't speak to me.

And by no means do I mean to demonize addiction here. I get that it's an actual disease and not something that anyone should shun. But I just didn't appreciate how literally every diary entry from age 12 to 25 was like, "Whatever I'm just going to get high fuck everything." Really? Has your perspective not changed at all in 13 years?

I feel like my review is very harsh. But in my defense, I read the book through 'til the end because I so hoped it would get better.

But it just didn't.

matt. singer. says

Lesley Arfin is not an extraordinary girl. She grew up a Jewish American Princess in Long Island, endured the same cattiness and extreme self-consciousness all teenagers suffer through, became a punk, then a raver, then went off to college — and became a full-blown junkie.

How does someone go from kick line and crushes and mosh pits to Ecstasy and crystal meth and heroin? That's what Arfin, now 28 and "straightedge," would like to know. "Dear Diary" is an extension of the column she writes for hipster tome Vice Magazine, in which she publishes entries from the journal she has kept since middle school and tries to figure out how what she went through then made her the person she is today. Admittedly, it's a brave concept. No one enjoys looking at pictures of themselves when they were younger, let alone making public every private insecurity and underdeveloped thought they've had from the age of 11. Even ballsier is Arfin's decision to track down those who have since left her life and ask them to explain their actions toward her.

Balls is not what the book lacks. What it lacks is the ability to transcend mere autobiography. Arfin wants her experience to say something about adolescence in general: "My diary entries became not just my life story. They're every girl's life story," she writes. "You're not me, but you're kind of me." This is basically true. Actress Chloë Sevigny co-signs this point in her introduction. She and Arfin had a similar upbringing, except where Arfin descended into drugs, Sevigny went off and gave Vincent Gallo an on-camera blowjob. Both are terrible mistakes — different kinds of mistakes, but mistakes nonetheless — and mistakes is what "Dear Diary" is about. Everyone makes them, boys included.

But while the diary gimmick is what makes Arfin's story worth reading at all, it is also what ultimately turns reading the book into little more than an exercise in base voyeurism. The design contributes to this effect: The magnetized back cover folds over to the front revealing the image of a padlock, and it even has the sweet, stale scent that would accompany a young girl's actual diary (I imagine). It's like finding the Ark of the Covenant in your girlfriend's closet. Arfin's frank descriptions of her sexual and pharmaceutical encounters — which, ironically, are more graphic in the retrospective updates she wrote with the intention of everyone seeing than in the personal, of-the-moment entries — are admirable, but as the book goes on the interest grows increasingly more prurient. This might reflect more on the reader than the author, but she certainly doesn't try to dissuade it: On the very first page, she includes an "Experience Timeline," which charts what she did and when. Seeing that she loses her virginity and starts taking mushrooms and acid in 12th grade makes you want to skip past the years of heavy petting, pot and psychological cruelty at the hands of her so-called "frienemies," which means ignoring the stuff that possibly explains why she got hooked on heroin during her sophomore year in college.

Even if you read straight through, though, Arfin never really finds an answer to the "How did I get here?" question. Her interviews with the people from her past unfortunately don't produce much in the way of revelations; they mostly end up as one-sided conversations. She had daddy issues, culminating in one beating at his hands, but for the most part her childhood was no more traumatic than anyone else's.

And that seems to be Arfin's point. Her getting into drugs wasn't the result of an unusually harrowing background or compensation for a particularly crippling self-image. It was simply a choice. She doesn't try to convince teenage girls to take another path — this isn't a PSA. She just wants them to know what they

might be getting into.

Liza Miller says

Full disclosure: There is a lot (A LOT) in Lesley Arfin's "Diary" to which I straight-up cannot relate. I don't know what it's like to do heroin (is that how you say it? "do heroin?"). I've never been to rehab. I never had a raver phase. (Should I be upset about that?) But I do remember what it's like to write in my diary as a pre-adolescent girl about how terrifying and strange it felt to start 6th grade. And, unlike Arfin, I never want to show my diaries to anyone, let alone publish them for the world to read. You can call her a junkie or a slut or any other word she's probably already called herself, but I would be willing to call anyone willing to share their darkest moments with complete strangers brave.

The setup is actually pretty clever: Arfin goes through her old diaries, rehashing and reliving some of her most horrifying moments as a teenager, and also comments on them. Even more cringe-inducing, she interviews people who were involved with the (often mortifying) journal entries to get their take. (This is also something I can't relate to. I still refuse to go to the grocery store when I visit my parents in case Tommy Amoroso is visiting his parents and we run into each other in the produce section. I already lost my virginity, Tommy; I don't need visitation rights to it.) This wrinkle in the editorial process produces some fascinating results and new perspectives on what would otherwise be (and still kind of is) a whole lot of navel gazing.

Readers who are past the point of Arfin's stories, and even those who are older than Arfin now, are quick to criticize this book as self-indulgent, solipsistic and romanticizing drug addiction. To those readers, I say be grateful for the hard-earned wisdom that comes with age. You've moved far beyond Arfin's years of doing mushrooms senior year or getting addicted to heroin. Maybe you never even came close to anything that harrowing, or maybe you just knew it wasn't for you from the start. It's easy to look at someone's past and point out all their mistakes. Hindsight is 20/20, and it gets sharper as our own eyesight dulls with age. Arfin might have fun reliving her addled, crazy youth, but she's not proud of it, no matter how insouciant her phrasing.

"The next ten years went: popular and cool, then persona non grata, then slut, then punk rock chick, then raver, then heroin addict, then clean, then writing this book..."

She can't change the past, and in publishing her diaries, she can no longer hope to rewrite it. (Sorry, girl.) But in reviewing it in such granular detail years later, she can attempt to better understand the girl she was to make sense of who she's become. Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it, and for as barbed and sarcastically funny as Arfin's trip down memory lane is, she doesn't seem too keen to repeat her youth anytime soon. In today's youth-obsessed culture, such an admission is perhaps the most shocking thing in all of Arfin's tales from the city: Youth is only fully understandable (and often only palatable) in a rearview mirror.

MariNaomi says

This book gave me a peek into what it might have been like, had I run rampant with my adolescent/early adulthood drug use. Oh, and had I not been terrified of needles. Lesley Arfin's journal entries (and especially her observations from an older age) really rang true to me, capturing the insecurities and desperation to please that I think all young girls go through. This book felt honest, thoughtful, and her writing style made me laugh aloud numerous times. Special excitement bonus points for the awesome illustrations by one of my favorite cartoonists, Vanessa Davis!

Naomi says

Oh where do I begin...

I guess I will begin with I was very disappointed with this book. I read reviews that compares this book to "Go Ask Alice"... ha. Whoever wrote that needs to re-read that book and then re-read "Dear Diary".

I think this book may have been able to be something great, well expect that Arfin lacks any seriously writing ability. And that fact this junkie lived off of her parents money for years... I mean you can't hate on someone for that, shit that would be the life. But then to make a statement like, "it never accured to me that not everyone's parents help them out"...seriously, did this girl live in a bubble?

I expected something great out of this book but it fell short, really really short.

Kate says

2.5 stars

I'm on the edge with this one and it's not of glory either. (Lady Gaga fans put your paws up!)

I liked the format a lot. I liked that she took the entries straight out of her personal diaries and then reflected upon it from her older self and interviewed the people involved with those entries. That was what made me stick with it and read it to the very end because Lesley Arfin has some big cajones for airing her personal laundry for all to see and read.

But (and it's a big one) I didn't like her spoiled bratty romanticism of her druggy ways. I'll admit I have a huge problem reading about drug addiction in memoirs for this reason alone. Sure, she admitted there's nothing romantic about it, yet, she spent a ton of time rehashing those memories.

I may not of come from Long Island, but I did come from upstate New York and saw way too many of my friends (especially those who were really fantastically artsy) die from heroin overdoses. That's why I never felt the urge to experiment with these kinds of drugs, even though they were prevelant in the punk rock and

rave scenes, which I would frequent for the music. However, even there I was considered an outcast for not experimenting enough. Oh well, at least I'm still alive and I'm glad Lesley is too.
