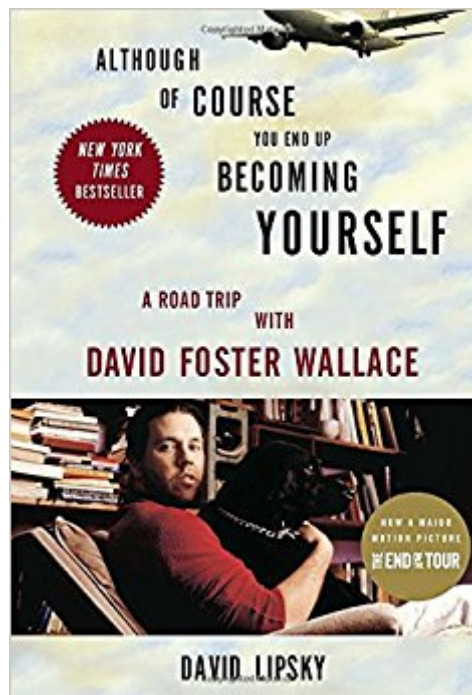




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# Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip With David Foster Wallace



## Synopsis

SOON TO BE A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE, STARRING JASON SEGAL AND JESSE EISENBERG, DIRECTED BY JAMES PONSOLDT

An indelible portrait of David Foster Wallace, by turns funny and inspiring, based on a five-day trip with award-winning writer David Lipsky during Wallace's "Infinite Jest" tour. In David Lipsky's view, David Foster Wallace was the best young writer in America. Wallace's pieces for Harper's magazine in the 1990s were, according to Lipsky, "like hearing for the first time the brain voice of everybody I knew: Here was how we all talked, experienced, thought. It was like smelling the damp in the air, seeing the first flash from a storm a mile away. You knew something gigantic was coming." Then Rolling Stone sent Lipsky to join Wallace on the last leg of his book tour for *Infinite Jest*, the novel that made him internationally famous. They lose to each other at chess. They get iced-in at an airport. They dash to Chicago to catch a make-up flight. They endure a terrible reader's escort in Minneapolis. Wallace does a reading, a signing, an NPR appearance. Wallace gives in and imbibes titanic amounts of hotel television (what he calls an "orgy of spectatorship"). They fly back to Illinois, drive home, walk Wallace's dogs. Amid these everyday events, Wallace tells Lipsky remarkable things—everything he can about his life, how he feels, what he thinks, what terrifies and fascinates and confounds him—in the writing voice Lipsky had come to love. Lipsky took notes, stopped envying him, and came to feel about him that grateful, awake feeling—the same way he felt about *Infinite Jest*. Then Lipsky heads to the airport, and Wallace goes to a dance at a Baptist church.

A biography in five days, *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself* is David Foster Wallace as few experienced this great American writer. Told in his own words, here is Wallace's own story, and his astonishing, humane, alert way of looking at the world; here are stories of being a young writer—of being young generally—trying to knit together your ideas of who you should be and who other people expect you to be, and of being young in March of 1996. And of what it was like to be with and—as he tells it—what it was like to become David Foster Wallace. "If you can think of times in your life that you've treated people with extraordinary decency and love, and pure uninterested concern, just because they were valuable as human beings. The ability to do that with ourselves. To treat ourselves the way we would treat a really good, precious friend. Or a tiny child of ours that we absolutely loved more than life itself. And I think it's probably possible to achieve that. I think part of the job we're here for is to learn how to do it. I know that sounds a little pious." —David Foster Wallace

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In early 1996, journalist and author Lipsky (*Absolutely American*) joined then-34-year-old David Foster Wallace on the last leg of his tour for *Infinite Jest* (Wallace's breakout novel) for a *Rolling Stone* interview that would never be published. Here, he presents the transcript of that interview, a rollicking dialogue that Lipsky sets up with a few brief but revealing essays, one of which touches upon Wallace's 2008 suicide and the reaction of those close to him (including his sister and his good friend Jonathan Franzen). Over the course of their five day road trip, Wallace discusses everything from teaching to his stay in a mental hospital to television to modern poetry to love and, of course, writing. Ironically, given Wallace's repeated concern that Lipsky would end up with an incomplete or misleading portrait, the format produces the kind of tangible, immediate, honest sense of its subject that a formal biography might labor for. Even as they capture a very earthbound encounter, full of common road-trip detours, Wallace's voice and insight have an eerie impact not entirely related to his tragic death; as Lipsky notes, Wallace "was such a natural writer he could talk in prose." Among the repetitions, ellipses, and fumbling that make Wallace's patter so compellingly real are observations as elegant and insightful as his essays. Prescient, funny, earnest, and honest, this lost conversation is far from an opportunistic piece of literary ephemera, but a candid and fascinating glimpse into a uniquely brilliant and very troubled writer.

On assignment for *Rolling Stone*, Lipsky hung out with David Foster Wallace and his two dogs in

Wallace's Illinois home, then accompanied the newly minted celebrity writer on a Midwest stretch of his 1996 book tour for his meganovel *Infinite Jest*. Lipsky's article was canceled, and now, in the wake of Wallace's 2008 suicide, Lipsky's recordings of five days' worth of the writer's brainy and passionate riffing on the nature of mind, the purpose of literature, and the pitfalls of both academia and entertainment are incredibly poignant. Lipsky (*Absolutely American*, 2003) vividly and incisively sets the before-and-after scenes for this revelatory oral history, in which Wallace is at once candid and cautious, funny and flinty, spellbinding and erudite as he articulates remarkably complex insights into depression, fiction that captures the "cognitive texture" of our time, and fame's double edge. Wild about movies, prescient about the impact of the Internet, and happiest writing, Wallace is radiantly present in this intimate portrait, a generous and refined work that will sustain Wallace's masterful and innovative books long into the future. --Donna Seaman

This book is a little time capsule. In 1996, at the very end of his "Infinite Jest" book tour, Wallace agreed to give Lipsky total journalistic access for a Rolling Stone profile. He wasn't thrilled about it ("this stuff is real bad for me ... I said yes to this, so that I could in good conscience say no to a couple of things that are just way more toxic"), but as an interview subject he was, as usual, pretty much ideal—honest, patient, and fully engaged. Lipsky shadowed him for five days. He slept at his house, played with his dogs, observed his writing class, drove him through a blizzard, sat next to him on airplanes, joined him for Denny's meals, and participated in endless hotel-room junk-TV binges. Meanwhile he recorded hours and hours of conversation—trivial, goofy, intense, occasionally slightly testy—covering everything from the malaise of end-of-the-century America to the seductive power of Alanis Morissette. Lipsky never wrote the profile (he got sent off instead, he says, to do a story about heroin addicts in Seattle), but he held on to the tapes. After Wallace's suicide in 2008, he unearthed and converted them, basically unmolested, into this book: a 300-page channeling of DFW's famous voice at precisely the moment it was becoming that famous voice. I myself found Lipsky's book totally fascinating. We get to watch DFW's signature self-consciousness churning at a length and ferocity unprecedented outside of his actual published writing. ("I don't mind appearing in Rolling Stone," he tells Lipsky at one point, "but I don't want to appear in Rolling Stone as somebody who wants to be in Rolling Stone.") It's like the Nixon tapes for

DFW-heads full of telling moments that would have been stripped from any reasonable magazine article. One of the effects of Wallace's prose is to make you irrationally want to be his best friend, and Lipsky creates a close likeness of that experience.

I adore David Foster Wallace's non-fiction writing and had watched *The Last Tour* prior to reading this book. I decided that *Road Trip* would provide some context and insight into Wallace, prior my to reading *Infinite Jest*. I also have been watching videos of Wallace interviews. ( Other readers might do that before reading *Road Trip* as it helps "hearing" Wallace while reading). For me, *Road Trip* bogged down at times due to Lipsky's repetitive questions about Wallace's ambivalence about success. It was obvious that Lipsky didn't believe the fourth and fifth iterations of Wallace's explanation, so Lipsky had to ask AGAIN and AGAIN. Miniscule insight was gathered with each repetitive ask, and yet other interesting topics were skimmed or diverted by Lipsky's interview style. Even with those criticisms, *Road Trip* is a superb way to understand a bit of Wallace the person, how he perceived his world, how that world-view informed his writing, and how he eventually arrived at the solution of suicide. Ten years before his death, it's clear that Wallace's nerve endings were close to the surface, and he was certainly trying to hold on, even then. Even as I knew the ending, throughout *Road Trip* I kept hoping that Wallace's thoughtful approach and analysis would lead him to conquer his fears of success, failure, and future. Sad for those of us who thrive on Wallace's vision.

This isn't the book I was expecting to read. I read it before seeing "The End of the Tour" (film adaptation) at a local festival, which is a good movie by the way. I was expecting a conventional prose memoir story, but what this really is is mostly a transcription of audio interview tapes with Lipsky's voice scattered in here and there. It's almost 300 pages of David Foster Wallace talking. If you're interested in him as a person, still trying to figure out if you think he was a disingenuously pretentious person or actually a genius, this book is a good place to start. It's just one long conversation between two writers, one at the peak of his impressive career, and the other sort of looking up to this person almost like a little brother. It's probably the quickest read you'll have of anything involving Wallace, and the book is actually really entertaining.

I love all the DFW material and it's interesting to watch him think out loud. David Lipsky interjects too much of himself though, and editorializes when he can't possibly know what DFW's motives are for saying what he does. He seems as in love with himself as he is interested in DFW.

The book ranges from hilarious to sad to mundane in its description of a week spent on the road with David Foster Wallace. It's not going to be phenomenally interesting to most people who don't already know and love the author, but to his fans it offers a number of bittersweet glimpses of his mind and life.

I read Infinite Jest 14 years ago - at the height of the hype. Publication of Lipsky's book reminded me of how much I enjoyed IJ and made me want to go back to it. But before returning to IJ I read Lipsky's book. As he (Lipsky) catalogs, DFW was essentially fresh off of having written, rewritten, retyped, rewritten, retyped, etc., IJ. All the themes and the overarching objectives of writing this book were still fresh in his mind (though not so much the specifics of, say, the chronology of the Year of the Tucks Medicated Pad). Now that I'm back into IJ I appreciate the work Lipsky did to bring this to us. I would strongly recommend this (along with, "E unibus pluram: television and U.S. fiction") to anyone who's ready to continue their infinite jest (or perhaps start on the road trip that does not end). My two favorite DFW quotes from this book: [Why he prefers crazy women; and feels he's ended up with lots of crazy ones...] "Psychotics, say what you want about them, tend to make the first move." "...[A]rt finds a way to take care of you.... Kind of despite itself."

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