



Based on a True Story

Norm Macdonald

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Wild, dangerous, and flat-out unbelievable, here is the incredible memoir of the actor, gambler, raconteur, *SNL* veteran, and one of the best stand-up comedians of all time.

As this book's title suggests, Norm Macdonald tells the story of his life more or less from his origins on a farm in the-back-of-beyond Canada and an epically disastrous appearance on *Star Search* to his account of auditioning for Lorne Michaels and his memorable run as the anchor of Weekend Update on *Saturday Night Live* until he was fired because a corporate executive didn't think he was funny.

But *Based on a True Story* is much more than a memoir; it's the hilarious, inspired epic of Norm's life. In dispatches from a road trip to Las Vegas (part of a plan hatched to regain the fortune he'd lost to sports betting and other vices) with his sidekick and enabler, Adam Eget, Norm recounts the milestone moments, the regrets, the love affairs, the times fortune smiled on his life, and the times it refused to smile. As the clock ticks down, Norm's debt reaches record heights, and he must find a way to evade the hefty price that's been placed on his head by one of the most dangerous loan sharks in the country.

As a comedy legend should, Norm peppers these pages with classic jokes and fondly mythologized Hollywood stories. This wildly adventurous, totally original, and absurdly funny saga turns the conventional comic's memoir on its head and gives the reader an exclusive pass into the mad, glorious mind of Norm Macdonald.

Based on a True Story Details

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From Reader Review Based on a True Story for online ebook

Brandon says

Based On A True Story is the autobiography of famed stand-up comedian Norm MacDonald - or so he would have you believe. Rather than tell you his real life story, Norm decided to write of his one-time plan to borrow millions of dollars from various casinos in Las Vegas, turn that money into millions for himself, then retire to a ranch in Montana. As the story moves along, Norm, strung out on morphine, tells a completely skewed, often fictionalized version of his life to his pal and real-life podcast co-host Adam Eget as he drives them from LA to Vegas.

While the majority of the memoir is totally off-base, its core is still tied to some of Norm's real life history. His time on Saturday Night Live is discussed with his arrival at the show depicting Lorne Michaels as an unhinged drug addict whom Norm bribes with government-grade morphine to secure his spot. His obsession with fellow cast member Sarah Silverman was a definite high point of the book - it had me laughing hysterically as he cluelessly pursued her, leading him to plot to assassinate her then-boyfriend Dave Attell. His move to the Update Desk is mentioned where he spent 3 years reading "the fake news" - he even includes a chapter of the Top 25 Update Jokes of All-Time (#1 belongs to Chevy Chase, 2-25 are all Norm's, of course)!

The filming of Dirty Work is also covered, although there's a story about a Canadian serial killer whose actions threatened the success of the movie (although if you believe Norm's word, Dirty Work was massively successful earning \$250 million its opening weekend). Like his earlier discussion of meeting Rodney Dangerfield, Norm's telling of hiring Don Rickles for the film stays within the scope of each of the aforementioned comedian's style. Norm became upset over constant insults from Don Rickles when trying to offer him a role in the movie, just like he couldn't understand why Rodney Dangerfield couldn't get any respect. Despite Norm admitting his admiration for the Rickles, his character was completely oblivious to the comedian's humour. This had me cry-laughing.

There's so much more that I could get into here, but I don't want to spoil everything. Based On A True Story was wildly original, completely over-the-top, and I absolutely loved it. There were points where I found myself laughing so hard my sides would hurt and if that isn't a proper endorsement, I don't know what is. The idea that Norm would portray himself as a narcissistic, delusional monster was completely unexpected and easily puts this in a category of its own.

Don says

** spoiler alert **

This is not a memoir. I don't think. It appears to start off as one, but then about halfway through, Norm seemingly tires of the genre and turns his life's story into something of a ludicrous picaresque novel. One of the delights of this read is the way in which he makes this transition; it took me a few pages to realize what was happening, and at one point I actually turned to Google to see if Norm had in fact committed any criminal acts against Dave Attell.

Those looking for juicy SNL gossip might be disappointed in this memoir/farce, but I found it to be utterly

delightful, (literally) laugh-out-loud funny. It's basically Norm doing his dry dumb-guy shtick for 200 pages, but he's so masterful at this, and his one-liners are so well-crafted, that it never felt tiresome. And that moth joke. Goddamn, I love that moth joke.

Brian says

Made up truth.

“Based on a True Story” is my first experience with an audio book. Although I think that it was a good way to experience this text, I don’t imagine there are many audiobooks in my future. However, hearing Norm’s voice is the best part, as it really brings out the cadence in his writing, and his delivery is one of his best traits.

Some highlights of the book:

*There is a rather touching tribute to the comic Sam Kinison, who died in 1992.

*Chapter 17 is classic Norm Macdonald humor. So witty and funny.

*I loved the occasional appearance of the book’s ghostwriter in the text. It is a clever and funny device. Especially in the audio edition, as it is literally another voice.

*Chapter 30, “The 25 best jokes from WEEKEND UPDATE” is definitely a highlight of the text. It deepens your appreciation for Macdonald’s time hosting that sketch.

*The very clever chapter in which Macdonald details his firing from SNL is brilliant. I won’t explain what he does here, but if anyone thinks Norm MacDonald is a dummy they need to read this book.

The last three chapters of “Based on a True Story” had me laughing and shaking my head with how crafty the entire premise of the book is. The idea behind it (I won’t spoil it) is insanely shrewd and appropriate. This “autobiography” is almost completely made up, but yet from that fiction a lot of truth emerges. If you are a Norm Macdonald fan this will add to your appreciation of him. If you don’t know his work, this might be a good start, maybe even buy the audio version and give a listen.

Sean says

A moth goes into a podiatrist’s office. The podiatrist says, “What’s the problem?” The moth says, “Where do I begin with my problems? Every day I go to work for Gregory Vassilievich, and all day long I toil. But what is my work? I am a bureaucrat, and so every day I joylessly move papers from one place to another and then back again. I no longer know what it is that I actually do, and I don’t even know if Gregory Vassilievich knows. He only knows that he has power over me, and this seems to bring him much happiness. And where is my happiness? It is when I awake in the morning and I do not know who I am. In that single moment I am happy. In that single moment, before the memory of who I am strikes me like a cane. And I take to the streets and walk, in a malaise, here and then there and then here again. And then it is time for work. Others stopped asking me what I do for a living long ago, for they know I will have no answer and will fix my empty eyes upon them, and they fear my melancholia might prove so deep as to be contagious. Sometimes, Doc, in the deepest dark of night, I awake in my bed and I turn to my right, and with horror I see some old lady lying on my arm. An old lady that I once loved, Doc, in whose flesh I once found splendor and now see only decay, an old lady who insults me by her very existence. “Once, Doc, when I was young, I flew into a spiderweb and was trapped. In my panic, I smashed my wings till the dust flew from them, but it did not free me and only alerted the spider. The spider moved toward me and I became still, and the spider stopped. I had heard

many stories from my elders about spiders, about how they would sink their fangs into your cephalothorax and you would be paralyzed but aware as the spider slowly devoured you. So I remained as still as possible, but when the spider again began moving toward me, I smashed my wing again into my cage of silk, and this time it worked. I cut into the web and freed myself and flew skyward. I was free and filled with joy, but this joy soon turned to horror: I looked down and saw that in my escape I had taken with me a single strand of silk, and at the end of the strand was the spider, who was scrambling upward toward me. Was I to die high in the sky, where no spider should be? I flew this way, then that, and finally I freed myself from the strand and watched as it floated earthward with the spider. But days later a strange feeling descended upon my soul, Doc. I began to feel that my life was that single strand of silk, with a deadly spider racing up it and toward me. And I felt that I had already been bitten by his venomous fangs and that I was living in a state of paralysis, as life devoured me whole. “My daughter, Alexandria, fell to the cold of last winter. The cold took her, as it did many of us. And so my family mourned. And I placed on my countenance the look of grief, Doc, but it was a masquerade. I felt no grief for my dead daughter but only envy. And so I have one child now, a boy, whose name is Stephan Mikhailovitch Smokovnikov, and I tell you now, Doc, with great and deep shame, the terrible truth. I no longer love him. When I look into his eyes, all I see is the same cowardice that I see when I catch a glimpse of my own eyes in a mirror. It is this cowardice that keeps me living, Doc, that keeps me moving from place to place, saying hello and goodbye, eating though hunger has long left me, walking without destination, and, at night, lying beside the strange old lady in this burlesque of a life I endure. If only the cowardice would abate for the time needed to reach over and pick up the cocked and loaded pistol that lies on my bedside table, then I might finally end this façade once and for all. But, alas, the cowardice takes no breaks; it is what defines me, it is what frames my life, it is what I am. And yet I cannot resign myself to my own life. Instead, despair is my constant companion as I walk here and then there, without dreams, without hope, and without love.” “Moth,” says the podiatrist, “your tale has moved me and it is clear you need help, but it is help I cannot provide. You must see a psychiatrist and tell him of your troubles. Why on earth did you come to my office?” The moth says, “Because the light was on.”

Invisibro says

I went into this book having a great deal of respect for Norm MacDonald. I've always found him to be a hilarious comedian - a seemingly good guy. In interviews he can be a bit dirty, but it's a facetious kind of dirty that casts personal judgment on the subjects that he's tackling.

Then I read this book. The Norm MacDonald I thought I knew from TV appearances and podcasts was quickly stripped away and replaced by a morphine addicted narcissist. This memoir recounts incident after incident of Norm MacDonald bullying people, or even worse! Throughout the course of the memoir, Norm systematically breaks down good people like his devoted friend Adam Eget and his ghost writer. His prose revel in his abuse of the hardest of drugs and he's dangerously unaware of his rampant alcoholism and its effects on those around him. He even describes in great detail how he savagely (view spoiler) and (view spoiler). There's even an entire chapter where Norm takes a terminally ill child (view spoiler). I mean this guy is a real jerk.

Kristina says

This is not your normal, straightforward memoir, far from it, actually. The best that I can describe it is off-the-wall or zany. Zany is not usually my cup of tea--I'd rather have a straight memoir dishing on all of the

author's inside information on show business and especially Saturday Night Live. Having said that, there were parts of this book that were really funny. That was its saving grace, the humor was on point. I still would've rather had more of Macdonald's real experiences, but this was a pretty cool book, a decent read.

Thank you to NetGalley and the publisher for a copy of this in exchange for an honest review.

11811 (Eleven) says

I'm one of those people who laughs at Norm even when he says something that arguably isn't even funny so I'm a little biased. This entire memoir is bullshit but it's very entertaining bullshit.

Krista says

There is the way things are and then the way things appear, and it is the way things appear, even when false, that is often the truest.

I'm Norm Macdonald and this is the fake memoir...or so the Germans would have you believe.

Okay, Norm Macdonald doesn't actually admit that this is a fake memoir, but Based on a True Story is both more and less than the typical celebrity tell-all: anyone looking for a behind-the-scenes look at *SNL* will be mostly disappointed; anyone looking for the sad facts of a stand-up's childhood that shattered his psyche and drove him to perform will be disappointed; anyone looking for a book-length shaggy dog story that provides *many* laugh out loud moments (and *some* intimate revelations) will leave satisfied. And come on, this is *Norm Macdonald*; who goes into this expecting sincere or serious?

Macdonald has been upfront before about his gambling addiction (he has “lost everything” a few times), so he uses this fact as a framework, depicting himself as a morphine-addicted compulsive gambler who racks up millions in debt in Vegas and is forced to write a memoir in order to pay off a loan shark. The narrative moves between Macdonald and his real-life friend Adam Eget and their adventures on the lam, and sections where Macdonald recalls his childhood in the Ottawa Valley (and even a quick fact check reveals he's actually from Quebec City, so who knows what bits might be true?), and *eventually*, it's revealed that Macdonald was forced to use a ghostwriter, and with intermittent sections in the voice of this ghostwriter, it becomes unclear whether Macdonald ever wrote any of this (and of course the whole time the reader understands that Macdonald wrote *all* of this). Meta, eh?

Before the ghostwriter was introduced, I was noting how overwritten sections felt, and I got a wry amusement out of the idea that Macdonald was pulling my leg; purposefully writing slightly cliched and florid, as any amateur writer might:

The slam of the car door wakes me, and my dreams fall away as the facts of my life tumble back into my empty head. I'm alone in the car and look out to see that I'm at the edge of the

desert, the God-forsaken desert where the snakes go hungry and die eating dirt. I see that Adam Eget is out there pacing around, agitated, a cigarette stuck to his mouth like always, like they must teach everyone to do at AA. And he's cursing a sky that has no stars, so I ask him what the problem is.

That's not *terrible* writing, but the fact that Macdonald kept the whole thing balanced on the thin edge of is-he-being-serious-or-ironic-with-this made me smile throughout (and when the self-important ghostwriter claims responsibility for the writing, the reader is encouraged to like the end result even less). Further irony, when Macdonald is describing his early success on the stand-up circuit:

I quickly developed a cult following. That sounds pretty good, but the truth is that it's the last thing you want to develop. The only time having a cult following is a good thing is when you are actually in a cult. Then you get to be a cult leader and life is milk and honey. First off, everyone thinks you are God, so you get to tell them all what to do. Your followers bow down before you and give you all their worldly goods, which can really add up, even with a smallish cult. The best part is you get to lie down with all the ladies from the cult, even the married ones. In a short matter of time, you become drunk with power and begin to lie down with the men also, not because you want to, but just because you can. Yes, being a cult leader with a cult following is fine work if you can find it. However, being a stand-up comedian with a cult following just means that most people hate your guts.

Ironic because wrapped around this nugget of truth about “a cult following just means that most people hate your guts” is the fact that the ghostwriter is actually named Charles Manson (not that one!) whose unfortunate name forced him to become the invisible talent behind numerous illiterate celebrities who need his help. (And if this Charles Manson is supposed to have written the whole book because Macdonald is the most illiterate of all, then why would he concoct a metaphor about the enviable life of a cult leader? These kind of moments occur throughout.)

Along the way, there are plenty of quips – *Death is a funny thing. Not funny haha, like a Woody Allen movie, but funny strange, like a Woody Allen marriage.* – and the chapters on Rodney Dangerfield and Don Rickles had me hooting (Warning: when I showed the chapter about Don Rickles to my daughter, she gamely cracked a smile; she didn't get it; you had to have grown up with these guys on TV, I guess), and when Macdonald shares his top 25 Weekend Update jokes, I laughed at each of them because I remembered them; I could still hear his deadpan delivery; see the cocked eyebrow (Note: my daughter laughed out loud at this list; I guess everyone can relate to O.J.'s lucky stabbing hat. Further note: Macdonald gets hilarious revenge on the NBC exec who fired him for refusing to stop with the O.J. jokes). Also along the way, Macdonald is generous in his praise of those who gave him his start (especially Dennis Miller and Adam Sandler; he also gives all the credit for any success he had on Weekend Update to his writing team), and he includes some moments which seem sincere:

Most people would think it's the wins that keep the gambler going, but any gambler knows that this is not true. As you place your chips on the craps table, you feel anxiety and impatience. When the red dice hit the green felt with a thunk and you're declared the winner and the chips are pushed toward you, you feel relief. Relief is all. And relief is fine, but hardly what a man

would give the whole rest of his life to gain. It has to be something else and the best I've come up with is this: It is a particular moment. A magic moment that occurs after the placing of a bet and before the result of that bet. It is after the red dice are thrown but before they lie still on the green felt where they fall. It is when the dice are in the air, and as long as they are there, time stops. As long as the red dice are in the air, the gambler has hope. And hope is a wonderful thing to be addicted to.

In **The Final Chapter** (which isn't actually the final chapter of the book), Macdonald writes, "I think a lot of people feel sorry for you if you were on *SNL* and emerged anything less than a superstar. They assume you must be bitter. But it is impossible for me to be bitter. I've been lucky." Even with his gambling losses, Macdonald claims to have no regrets, and although I can't say that I know him any better now than I did before picking up *Based on a True Story*, I was thoroughly amused by this read and don't think Macdonald owes me any more than that; even if I *have* seen him on TV.

Andrew says

If you're a fan of Norm Macdonald's humor, read this book.
Well, don't read it - listen to the audiobook.

It's hard to get too much into what makes this book so special without "spoiling" it. Ultimately, it proves how vivid and accurate a picture you can create of a person when you're not restricted to facts alone. The more the book (a novel) plays around with the memoir format, the more true to Norm's mind it gets, and the more meaning you'll find if you're paying attention.

The audiobook adds a whole extra layer to the comedy and the formal experiments - and truly feels like the essential form in which to consume it. Being able to hear Norm's thoughts, jokes, and absurdities in his own voice and rhythm enhances the material, obviously, but that's only half of it. You just have to listen.

Sam Quixote says

Norm MacDonald's book *Based on a True Story* is a nonfiction memoir. And I am Batman, aka The Dark Knight, protector of Gotham City. Yup, neither statement is true!

Maybe he thinks his life isn't that interesting or that it's funnier to do it this way, but Norm has framed his memoir/debut novel with a story that resembles a cross between *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Ocean's 11*! He writes himself as a scheming conman and morphine and gambling addict, determined to borrow a million bucks from crooks, turn it into multi-millions at the casinos, and retire to a ranch. Norm MacDonald by the way is a Canadian stand-up comic best known for his stint on *Saturday Night Live* as the Weekend Update anchor.

It's an unexpected direction to take an autobiography but it's a creative choice that results in a decent read. It's also unclear just how much of this is real but I'd wager almost all of it is made-up! Norm briefly mentions growing up on a farm and being molested by a slow-witted farmhand before launching into his stand-up career, touring with and learning from the likes of Sam Kinison. And that's basically it for his formative years!

There are some brief chapters on working at SNL and his movie *Dirty Work*, neither of which are very illuminating but the chapter on Weekend Update jokes was funny and the bizarre serial-killer subplot behind the making of *Dirty Work* as a way of explaining why it bombed was amusing (it made \$10 million on a \$13 million budget though Norm claims the movie made \$250 million!).

And aside from writing Lorne Michaels as a morphine addict like him, the numerous famous people who appear throughout only get brief mentions. I liked though that Norm wrote the Rodney Dangerfield and Don Rickles scenes in the style of those comics – very funny!

Things get meta when Norm introduces his “ghost writer”, Terence Keane (real name Charles Manson – not THAT one!), who despises Norm and lets the reader into what he’s really like. Keane’s bitterness that his arty novels get passed over is heightened after being paid to write the boorish Norm’s book who’s making a small fortune out of the deal. It’s another unusual and silly angle to a book that’s increasingly about creating and destroying a fictional Norm MacDonald as thoroughly as possible!

Given the prominence of a made-up character like Terence Keane (among others) I thought his Sancho Panza Adam Eget also wasn’t real and the name was a thinly-veiled pun - a damn eejit/idiot = Adam Eget. Especially as Adam Eget does act like a damn idiot all the way through! But apparently he is a real person and is Norm’s podcast co-host.

Ironically, the fictional gambling stuff, which is clichéd and cheesy, turns out to be far less interesting than the real life sections which makes me wish Norm had been less unconventional and written a straight memoir, and I suspect readers hoping for the latter will be disappointed with what they actually get. Maybe next time Norm should jettison the pretence and just write a crime novel instead? I might like that better.... BECAUSE I’M BATMAN!

Chris Jaffe says

Well, that was disappointing. Norm Macdonald is hilarious, and at times this book is as well - but it keeps getting in its own way with a schtick that is more annoying than entertaining.

The premise is intriguing: Norm will tell stories about his life, but make stuff up along the way (hence the title of the book). OK - and the book gets off to a nice start with (supposed) childhood tales. But two things in the book undermine it - and both get stronger and more pronounced as the story goes on. First, Norm keeps including his life "tales" with a fictional get-rich-or-die-trying effort at Las Vegas. This tale is rarely interesting - and takes up damn near half of the book. Second, he includes little bits from his (fictional) ghostwriter who hates Norm's guts. The first bit or two of it is cute, but it becomes more involved and more elaborate and the ghostwriter has a breakdown, nearly attempts suicide, and then comes to think he's actually Norm Macdonald himself.

By the end of the book, it's the story of Norm on the run from a loan shark and dealing with his mentally ill ghostwriter. It's just dumb.

Plenty of moments are funny, and the book might deserve three stars out of five, but I was increasingly annoyed by it as it went along, so two stars only.

Danger says

This was hilarious and weird and dark and so very, very Norm Macdonald and I loved it.

Fabian says

"BEST COMEDIC AUTOBIO EVER!"

would've been too generous a tagline (that one may belong to British funwit Russell Brand. Or Kathy Griffin's). But it is not wholly untrue: it is the only of its kind that actually dabbles with the (capital L) Literary. Yes, it is THE Norm Macdonald autobio (and not the Tina Fey, Amy Pohler, Rachel Dratch, Sarah Silverman, [even!!!] Steve Martin ones!) which transcends form. It takes Quixotean turns (i.e. postmodernism)! There's a "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas"-type ambiance! It is so so smart that it left my mind reeling. I mean, this was the dude on SNL who deadpanned not so funny jokes on Weekend Update. For years!

"Based" remains the best SNL alumni comedic autobio ever!

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

Man was I looking forward to reading this book. In case I haven't made it really flippin' crystal clear already, I'm a HUUUUGE fan of all things SNL. While others complain about bad seasons and bad casts, I am a constant defender and only acknowledge bad skits or bad reoccurring characters rather than opting to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I also believe Norm Macdonald is one of comedy's most untapped resources. His dry delivery and "guy you'd like to have a beer with" approachability have made him a favorite of mine. Not to mention how well he did behind the news desk on the Weekend Update – that is, until jokes about a certain someone got to be too much and he ended up shitcanned . . .

When it comes to reading books about SNL folks (or comedians in general, for that matter) I expect there to be a lot of funny ha-ha. While there was a blip about how a certain someone came to fruition . . .

And while there is obviously **way** more material to work with during this current election cycle . . .

There was a notable void in discussion of another pretty memorable candidate . . .

Or even how the ever rotating casting of this character came to be . . .

In fact, there was practically nothing mentioned about **anything**. Instead, Norm's "biography" read a little like a long, strange acid trip or a road trip similar to another I've read about before

Basically, Norm's book is nothing but bullshit. He spins yarns of a high-functioning morphine addiction, doing hard time in the joint (as well as butt-rape, natch), and running up a million dollar all-or-nothing marker in Vegas. Out of 200+ pages the only things that seemed to be real rather than "based on a true story" were Norm's unending appreciation for Adam Sandler's friendship and all he has done in order to keep enough cash in Norm's pocket to keep purchasing his Wild Turkey 101

And a story of "Old Jack," a hired hand who lived on his family's farm for ages and one day took an 8 year old Norm to see his pet squirrel

"He closed the door and the inside of the shed went black. Then I heard the bolt. I forget what happened next."

Needless to say that little tidbit threw me for a bit of a loop

I have no idea if this book will work for others. All I can say it is different from **any** other biography I've ever read.

Courtney says

I have long been a fan of Norm Macdonald, and with good reason - he is brilliant.

I have long been anticipating his book, and with good reason - he is an immaculate storyteller.

I was hoping to savor this treasure, to dwell on the tidbits of gold (for indeed he did give gold, not straw and a Rumpelstiltskean task like he claims) but I quickly became consumed and did not come up for breath until I read the very last word.

I had heard rumors that it was to be more fiction than fact, and while I would love to hear more bona fide accounts of his life, I also knew not to expect it, at least not fully. He is not one to tell tales out of school after all. But, he does show that he is one to examine subjects like the meanings and interpretations of truth and perception and apply these concepts in self-examination of his life.

The ghostwriter narrative of the story is riveting. At first glance I expected Keane to be used as another voice of self-deprecation, but his spiraling storyline is both entertaining and haunting.

As his journalist brother's wonderful article on the book discusses, it is definitely a book that will be

appreciated by his "cultists". The book is an arresting read and displays his light darkness and probably will be appreciated by neither literalists nor the faint of heart. I've always loved how he can make me laugh at bleakness but I know that's not everyone's cup of tea.

There are a lot of gems and beautifully written passages. He also asks the important questions, like:

"Do you consider Wink Martindale historically wicked?"

All in all, and for what it's worth, I give this book the 5 stars I was previously expecting to assign in my impartial review.
