



Shot in the Heart

Mikal Gilmore

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Gary Gilmore, the infamous murderer immortalized by Norman Mailer in *The Executioner's Song*, campaigned for his own death and was executed by firing squad in 1977. Writer Mikal Gilmore is his younger brother. In *Shot in the Heart*, he tells the stunning story of their wildly dysfunctional family: their mother, a blacksheep daughter of unforgiving Mormon farmers; their father, a drunk, thief, and con man. It was a family destroyed by a multigenerational history of child abuse, alcoholism, crime, adultery, and murder. Mikal, burdened with the guilt of being his father's favorite and the shame of being Gary's brother, gracefully and painfully relates a murder tale "from inside the house where murder is born... a house that, in some ways, [he has] never been able to leave." *Shot in the Heart* is the history of an American family inextricably tied up with violence, and the story of how the children of this family committed murder and murdered themselves in payment for a long lineage of ruin. Haunting, harrowing, and profoundly affecting, *Shot in the Heart* exposes and explores a dark vein of American life that most of us would rather ignore. It is a book that will leave no reader unchanged.

Shot in the Heart Details

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From Reader Review Shot in the Heart for online ebook

Mariel says

Mikal Gilmore was the "saved" son. Born after the restless years in the ditches of the back roads of America, running only to beat out another day, like stretching a junk yard car past empty to see how long it'll still go. Saved and kicked out of the family for his own good, because he could be too good, if he was lucky. It doesn't really feel good, or lucky. Second son Gary became famous for wishing his execution to be carried out (coughs as famously written about in Norman Mailer's book *The Executioner's Song*). He was dead long before then. Second youngest Gaylen was murdered. He was also asking for it (jealous husbands, alcoholism and killing himself every day). Like Gary, he was in jail a lot. There was a legacy to escape before then. Did the unchosen brothers choose it too?

Mikal ran away, became a music journalist (for Rolling Stone). Blah blah personal shit about me no one wants to read blah blah I knew how Mikal felt for being lucky that his father died when he did. Mikal was the favorite, as Gaylen was for a time (if you can't guess how Gaylen took that you're lucky), because he was too young to have his own personality outside of what his dad could project onto him. Frank Sr. was a vicious son of a bitch. A con artist with more identities than he had wives. Or was it the other way around? Blah blah Bessie reminded me of my grandmother laying over for the abuse and grossly favoring one child while grossly abusing another. Family crap. Ugh. I get the running away to save oneself thing (my grandmother's sister did just that. Her cousin recently contact the family after her husband died. He wouldn't let her while my grandfather was alive. No kidding!). I got too being the one to watch the fleeing shapes on the horizon.

Was it all a family curse? The symmetry was like a bloodied up face that no longer looks like a face. The fists don't need a spine (this family didn't have one. A backbone, that is) to hit and the bonelessness stands up under it because its filled of blood to keep on spilling. I don't know if it's fate. Bessie told them bogus stories about forced outtings to executions as a kid before her sons were ever arrested. Frank sr. believed he was the unclaimed son of Harry Houdini because of a lie his mother told. Nurture over nature, I'd say. The same face repeating in the family. Frank Jr, the oldest child, went to prison for NOT killing (Vietnam). It's irony (tastes like blood). Bessie was bitter over being her own family's black sheep (from a joyless for anyone who craved the tiniest bit of free will existence on a very mormon farm in a very mormon community in Utah). Did she urge one son, Mikal, to get out and the other, Gary, whom she identified as a fellow blacksheep to revenge her against the mormons she blamed for everything? Mikal believed so. Bessie comforted herself with tears and rage that the death of her son was all for the cause of the Mormon world against her. She must've believed Mikal to be the best of her and Gary the worst (she made a deal with her husband to allow the one son, Mikal, to be raised in "her faith"). Bessie brutalized her oldest son, Frank jr. because he was the product of an affair with her husband's son from another marriage. Frank sr. tried to beat Gary out of existence because he believed him to not be his son.

Mikal was once a mormon. Mormons believe in curses and spirits. (Ask me about the ultra glam mormon chick who once tried to convert me. This review is going to be long enough as it is.) Shot in the Heart doesn't work as well as a case for a curse. Can anyone explain to me how a woman blames her son because she fucked a man who wasn't her husband? Is there a curse for that? Is it called *Thou Wilst Be A Psycho Bitch?* I hex you into permanent PMS!

The book that Gilmore wanted to write was an attempt to be in his family after decades of being pushed out and then running as far as he could, the chance to know them through investigating them like a case to be

solved. The interviews that Larry Schiller conducted that were used for Mailer's book. Prison records, interviewing former prison friends of his brother, relatives who were still living. It didn't work. He doesn't know them. The face repeating on Mikal that he doesn't want to see in the mirror is that of a man without family (as his father saw it, family being someone in exactly his own preferred image). His relationships break up, he has no children. What did they save him from???

WHAT ABOUT FRANK!!!!

Shot in the Heart made me cry because it was cruel and the waste. Frank. It is telling that it isn't mentioned anywhere in The Executioner's Song that Frank was supporting his mother during her final years. She talks about dying the day she moved into her ugly trailer (her big tragedy was losing her pretty dream home). Yeah, I kinda hate this dead woman. Her ugly face repeated from her own family and then it picked up its own ugliness. She made a few faces and it got stuck that way. Frank who went to prison for refusing to kill anyone in the war. He was sentenced to three years in Fort Leavenworth (the money for lawyers were used up on repeat offending brothers), an unusually harsh punishment. Frank the only one who visited either of his brothers in jail. Frank who was ashamed of himself and stayed away from his brother so that he wouldn't embarrass him. The man who was sometimes homeless, ashamed of himself and afraid to shop in stores because the clerks might think him a shoplifter. It took Mikal too long to realize that he had a fucking family. He wasn't kicked out of it. They all chose to leave it. It should not have been an afterthought to look for his brother. He did the right thing but that he took so long to see it is why this book is only good and not great. Mikal was loved by two parents (for all the good that did) and Frank was hated by both. How can you ever understand families when that shit happens? Some people have all the luck and others get all the crap. Family isn't going to come from the (half hearted at that) echoes of Mormon religion rolling around in the empty caverns of dead people (Bessie, brother Gaylen). It's brotherhood.

The Executioner's Song was largely dependent on often very (self) biased testimony from the interviews taken by a man (Schiller) who I suspect didn't understand what was special about this story. (His talk with Mikal about the movie, directed by Schiller, confirmed it for me. He said that Tommy Lee Jones wasn't Gary but took you to the same place. No, he really didn't.) I took it with all the salt over the shoulder to ward off bad luck I could muster. Shot in the Heart, well, shoots down some of that. Gary's second nine year stretch in the big house wasn't because he was tasting what he could get when he was out (parole for art school). He was going to bust out his boyfriend. Gilmore barely admitted to himself that he had homosexual loves (starting while in juvie). He had a son that he believed to be dead (also not mentioned in 'Executioner's' from a [statutory? Or more] rape. The charges were dropped). He denied that his mother was anything but a saint. Still, the taste in the mouth is blood from chewing your tongue not to scream. The gravity of the true self weighing down the escapes from self to stay alive. I read more truth in those voices than in Mikal's (albeit understandable) desperate tracing of the path with a set conclusion in mind that it had been the destiny of their family. To find a voice, I suspect. To hear another voice to not be lonely, as Gary did? I'm not so sure.

Mikal had a save yourself upbringing. How could he understand fascination with what one COULD do that comes out of a self destructive streak? He tries to say that it could have been him, as if that would help him understand Gary. Not in the same way could it have been him (it wasn't Frank). Do you know something others don't know when you kill someone? When you are dead? Gary said he had a feeling he had already been there (death). I don't think he knew anything. It isn't a special club to be in when you have been abused. It's the self destructive just before that Gary could not resist, why no punishment ever stopped him from doing it again (as it did Frank jr. He never stole another candy bar). I got that out of The Executioner's Song. I got some things out of Shot in the Heart (it's a good book) too. In the same face way I find the meaning of family in that sensing of what's not being told. There isn't a light at the end of the tunnel and leaping anyway. It's his family so he would want to tell it to himself like it's a family reunion. But it wasn't family. There was

Frank.

I stuck my face into the glossy pages of Mikal's Rolling Stone magazine and came out with these apples of A-to-z.

A is for Artist. He didn't want it. Do I take away the capital? artist. Fuck it. ARTIST. If you can't take it away from Whitney Houston...

Give me a B for Bicentennial shoelaces. Coulda said Bessie. We're black sheep against the farm, boy! I like the shoelaces. They were in the film. Elias Koteas rocked those suckers.

Cuckoo's nest. It was so nice he watched it twice.

Damned Death Wish. Demian. I liked Hesse's book too. I can just imagine what a Gary Gilmore goodreads review of that book would be...

Eyes donated to science. Did you think I'd execute another sentence here?

Firing squad! Father Frank sr and firing squad. Same difference.

The Ginger man. Wonder if he liked The Beastly Beatitudes of Baltazar B (GG and I have knowledge of the J.P. Donleavy ouevre in common). His dad may have loathed him for his name but alliteration is still good for something. Like being a super villain!

Houdini. He is not Gary's grandfather! Frank's dad thought he was. I can imagine him during his own prison stretch willing those nonexistent escape genes to come through.

IQ. Is this like when they say it's a shame if someone dies if they are pretty? It's a shame he killed. He had a high iq.

Johnny cash. If you had one day of freedom who would you listen to? It's the new desert island discs.

Killer.

Let's do this.

Mormons.

(Selective, of course) Nietzsche quoting. Nicole (selective, of course).

Oldness. The anti- the force from Star Wars. It'd be a black hole that sucks in everything good and reflects it back as dead. Don't try to keep any life in it. You aren't going to get any stinking pot purri out of the remains. Proxilin the drug they turned Gary into a Frankenstein's monster on in prison. Pizza hut. They didn't let Gary have any during his execution party.

Queer. 1, 2, 3, 4...

Rape. 5, 6, 7, 8 shut the gates.

Solitary Aka the hole! Son. They told Gary that he died. He didn't. Was he born dead like Gary? Frank thought so. "There will always be a father." (His real last words! Nike better change that slogan now. Give your money to the man, Chinese kids! We're your daddy.) Indeed.

Texas. Gary was born there. It wasn't an affectation (as much) after all!

Utah. The only state to choose execution methods based on their religious beliefs (blood atonement by firing squad).

V for Verdict. V for Vendetta. Probably for venarial disease. I didn't check.

Witness.

X-con. What other words start with X? X-cape. (Please somebody get that reference.)

Yesterday.

Zzzzz zzz he slept when he was dead.

Zhara says

This will book always be my favorite nonfiction book, but just like Sophie's Choice it will break my heart

each time, but unlike Sophie's Choice this book has real live, breathing, people who paved the road with pain, blood, and heartache. This nonfiction book reads like a novel every time I read this book I have a hard time putting it down and lose track of time. A masterpiece of the depressing, soul tearing, kind.

Andy says

You think you have a messed up family? Well, you probably do, but I can pretty much guarantee it's not as messed up as Mikal Gilmore's family. This book describes what it was like to grow up as the younger brother of Gary Gilmore.

This book was really good, and I think Mikal Gilmore is an awesome author. The only reason that I gave it three stars instead of four was that it was pretty heavy on the psychoanalysis of the Gilmore family dynamic. Sometimes it just got to be too much. (P.S. I ended up changing this to four stars. The book is too good for three stars.)

I know that was the purpose of this book, but at times it was just too thick and heavy. The editor was maybe just a bit too conservative. Reading this book was like trying to get drunk on Guinness. You enjoy it, it tastes great, but you can't go too fast because it's just too thick to really plow through.

♥ Marlene♥ says

I loved this book. After 450 pages I started to read The Execution's Song and at the end I read both books at the same time. Mikal's view and the view of people in Norman Mailer's book.

I highly recommend both books.

My updates:

11/29/2008 page 177 29.9% "Finally a good book again. I've always wanted to read more about Gary Gilmore. Back in the punk days we used to listen to a song, called Looking through Gary Gilmore's eyes"

11/29/2008 page 178 30.07% "By the other book I mean The Execution's Song by Norman Mailer. Funny I know Norman Mailer also thanks to a song back in the days. A song by Lloyd Cole Are you Ready to be Heartbroken"

11/30/2008 page 235 39.7%

12/02/2008 page 387 65.37% "this is good!"

12/04/2008 page 450 76.01% "Great. Now I stopped and started reading The other book about Gary Gilmore and then come back to this one.

Lia says

Bookclub is killing me this year.

Nope. Not for me. Barely made it to chapter 3.

I will say that it may well be a brilliant book, however I never read true crime. Ever. I also felt detached from the story. I don't enjoy this type of almost dysfunctional family porn. However if you do like harrowing stories of misery. Then please, read what you like and this may just be the book for you. It is not the book for me.

Shaun says

A little disjointed at times but overall a compelling narrative of Gary Gilmore, the first man to be executed in the US after the death penalty was reinstated. (The death penalty had been deemed "cruel and unusual" punishment by a 1972 ruling, but a new ruling by the US Supreme Court in 1976 upheld new death penalty statutes.)

I haven't read *The Executioner's Song*, though I've since ordered it, so I'm not sure how this compares. I have to believe that being written by Gary Gilmore's brother (the youngest of the four sons) gives this a depth and level of authenticity that only someone intimately involved with the main characters can provide.

I think the strength of this particular version is the reader gets a sense of the complicated family dynamic both long before, leading up to, and after the murders (which were both brutal and cold-blooded). These were four boys raised in a violent and dysfunctional home, equally brimming with love and hate, by two deeply scarred and dysfunctional individuals. The story of Gary's parents and their family history is almost more interesting than Gary himself.

At one point after Gary has been arrested for the murders his mother says:

Can you imagine what it feels like to mother a son whom you love that deprives two other mothers of their sons?

And, no, I can't. But then there are a lot of things in Gary's family past and home life that I can't imagine. I think many of us experience some level of dysfunction growing up, but the Gilmores seem to represent the extreme of what some children are forced to deal with.

It really is a heartbreak story, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't shed a tear or two over Gary's execution and the impact it had on his family. Of course, it's easier to feel for Gary in this particular story, since his victims aren't the focus...and perhaps that is a shortcoming of this kind of book. That said, I am generally opposed to the death penalty and this particular story challenged me to explore those feelings at a much deeper level. I was particularly moved by this passage:

There was no way to brace for the last seesawing of emotion. One moment you're forcing yourself to live through the hell of knowing that somebody you love is going to die in a known way, at a specific time and place, and that not only is there nothing you can do to change that, but that for the rest of your life, you will have to move around in a world that wanted this death to happen. You will have to walk past people every day who were heartened by the killing of

somebody in your family--somebody who had long ago been himself murdered emotionally. You will have to live in this world and either hate it or make peace with it, because it is the only world you will have available to live in. It is the only world that is.

Again, not to diminish the pain and suffering of the victims and their families, but this particular presentation does seem to illustrate that the death penalty...the eye-for-an-eye mentality...is somewhat barbaric and somehow destructive to the men and women in our society that are directly involved in the process. Part of what makes this story so interesting is Gary waived all his rights to appeal. He wanted to die and fought his family when they tried to obtain a stay of the execution.

I should also add that this book focused less on the implications of Gary's execution and actually less on Gary and his crimes than one might expect in a retelling of his story. It focused primarily on the family unit as a whole with Mikal offering his own analysis and sharing his own journey. All in all, it worked, though whether it works for you or not may depend on your expectations going in.

Rene Denfeld says

One of my all-time favorite memoirs. Gilmore writes with distinction, a sort of clear-eyed kindness towards self and others. Having also grown up in severe poverty and dysfunction, I related to every word of this amazing book. It's not just a story of one family—it's a story about a side to our country we too often ignore, or condemn.

Zarb says

I was a bit hesitant to read this one, mainly because I'm wary of books by authors who draw their legitimacy mainly from just being close to events that capture the public imagination. Most of us are not great writers, or even good ones and thus when a book turns up in a fashion that suggests a publisher is here to cash in on popular culture, rather than support a talent, I want little to do with it. Funnily enough now that I rave about this book to others I often see the same wariness frosting their eyes. It's a shame because this book is just plain fucking amazing. Y'know when certain people describe something as "heavy", well this book is exactly that. Its a tale by a person who is burdened by memories that are for the most part just plain awful and who, perhaps in some misguided effort to achieve some kind of catharsis through understanding, decides to chronicle his families miserable history using the solid journalistic skills at his disposal, while always accepting the fact that he is a player in the whole terrible narrative. It's a courageous, deeply felt and insightful piece of work, a book full of bad vibes and dark tragedy, and certainly worth your time.

Ursula says

Years ago, I devoured the gigantic Executioner's Song by Norman Mailer in a weekend. Gary Gilmore's story as Mailer told it was heart-wrenching and involving. I picked up Shot in the Heart to see what Mikal

Gilmore could add to the story. The answer is both a lot and not much.

Mikal was the youngest of the four Gilmore boys, with a 6-year gap between him and the next-youngest, Gaylen. Mikal's memories start well after Gary's life had started down a hard path; in fact, his first memory of Gary is of a stranger being introduced as his brother (Gary had been away at a boarding school for troubled children). In some ways, Mikal lived in a different world than his brothers. Their father didn't beat Mikal, while the others were subjected to cruel treatment regularly. Mikal traveled with their father, keeping him away from his brothers and their troubles for much of his youth. He lived in a different world, but it wasn't untouched by the family's legacy of violence and chaos.

He relies on his oldest brother Frank's memory for many of the things that happened while he wasn't around, and Frank has a way with words. Both brothers are able to look back with unflinching honesty at what it was like for them, and what it may have been like for their lost brothers. This book is less about Gary Gilmore's murders and execution and more about what may have driven him to them, what demons the family had, and the mystery of how those demons affected four brothers differently. I don't know that this book alone would give you much information about Gary's case and his death without having read *The Executioner's Song*, but it's a powerful look at Gary's origins and surroundings if you have read the other book.

Nnedi says

Chilling, disturbing, and very well-told. *Executioner's Song* was over a thousand pages and a wonderful book. Nevertheless, it somehow managed to tell less than half the story. I'm really glad I read this right after. Now I get it. Now I see. Gary Gilmore wasn't just some crazy man (which makes his violence that much more horrifying and sick). What he did was practically inevitable. It could have been so much worse. He is a prime example of the failure of America's prison and Capital Punishment systems. He is the result of familial break-down and bad luck and bad choices. His brother tells the heartbreak story of his family's history and demise with passion and honesty. He worked HARD to create this book. I'm sure there are parts he misinterpreted or got wrong, but I don't think that matters here. What matters is that he captured the soul of his tale. I really felt it. Bravo.

Peter Landau says

There was a time when I was obsessed with finding a truly scary novel, something that wasn't merely shocking, but crept under the skin and freaked me out at my core. I never found one until now. The memoir *SHOT IN THE HEART* by Mikal Gilmore, the younger brother of Gary Gilmore, the convicted killer who made the State of Utah carry out the death penalty it had sentenced him, reads like that gothic novel I had been searching for. There are ghosts and dark dreams, violence and bloodletting religion, magic and crime, beatings and betrayals. While Norman Mailer's *THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG* tells a balanced and meticulous story about Gary Gilmore's life after being released from prison, murdering two young Mormon men and the drama leading up to his execution by firing squad, Mikal Gilmore's book is its worthy companion in that it unearths the demons from the family's past, which haunted the four sons and levied a great price on all their lives. When I started reading the book its style felt melodramatic, but page after page of atrocities earned its heavy tone. There are curses that have nothing to do with supernatural forces. They arise from mundane sources and cycle through generations of victimhood where everyone loses. That Mikal Gilmore was able to walk away from this place and then return to expose it truthfully and fearlessly is the

only way horror can be faced and put down.

Julie lit pour les autres says

Réflexion du jour: si Norman Mailer prend la décision d'écrire sur ton frère, il y a de bonnes chances que ta famille soit un foutu bordel.

En 1979 paraît *The Executioner's Song (Le chant du bourreau)*, un roman biographique relatant les événements qui ont mené à l'exécution de Gary Gilmore, en Utah. Gagnant du Prix Pulitzer, ce livre racontait les deux meurtres commis par Gilmore, ainsi que sa campagne pour sa propre exécution. Gilmore a été le premier homme tué après le rétablissement de la peine de mort par la Cour Suprême des États-Unis, et il a également choisi sa mort : fusillé par un peloton d'exécution.

Quinze ans plus tard, en 1994, c'est Mikal, le plus jeune frère des quatre frères Gilmore, qui prend la parole. Ayant refusé de parler à Norman Mailer à l'époque de l'emprisonnement de son frère, il admet se sentir coupable de ne pas l'avoir fait après avoir lu le livre du grand romancier et de la justesse du portrait qu'il a fait de son frère. Mikal est devenu journaliste spécialisé en musique. Il écrit pour le Rolling Stone et d'autres publications prestigieuses. Il a même écrit sur son frère lors des événements. Dans *Un long silence* (j'ai lu la traduction française), Mikal plonge dans l'histoire de sa famille, fait un portrait inoubliable et saisissant des personnes qui la composent, sans épargner au lecteur/à la lectrice la violence physique, verbale et psychologique qui régnait dans la dynamique familiale. Même si Mikal ne croit pas au destin et a des mots particulièrement durs à l'égard de ceux et celles qui y croient, il y a des moments douloureux de flottements existentiels dans son témoignage. Il cherche un sens à toute cette misère, à tout ce chagrin, à toute cette violence. Il relate même la fondation de l'église mormone et de son goût du sang répandu (la mère de Mikal a été élevée dans une famille mormone stricte); on sent qu'il est à la recherche de la source de tout ce gâchis.

La voix de Mikal Gilmore est honnête, directe et authentique. On a souvent le sentiment qu'il nous raconte le fruit de ses recherches assis au comptoir d'un bar enfumé, devant un verre. Mikal ne (se) cache rien. Ni son sentiment de culpabilité étouffant, ni sa colère, ni ses propres travers, ni son affection envers sa famille.

Et il y a de ces moments qui te sciennent les jambes par la froideur de leur désespoir. Mikal dit de ses parents: *Frank Gilmore et Bessie Brown étaient deux êtres pitoyables et misérables. Je les aime, mais je dois dire ceci: c'est une tragédie qu'ils aient eu des enfants.*

Le moment le plus marquant pour moi - et il faut me croire, il y en a plusieurs dans ce récit, c'est bien difficile de choisir - c'est la conversation qu'ont Mikal et Gary à quelques semaines de l'exécution de ce dernier. Mikal tente de comprendre ce qui a poussé son frère à tuer, ce qu'il cherchait à faire, où il allait avant de se faire arrêter. La réponse de Gary est tellement terrifiante que j'ai dû déposer le livre quelques instants pour réfléchir à l'implication de ses paroles. On lit comment Mikal encaisse le choc. On ravale avec lui.

Ce livre m'a profondément bouleversée, surtout en raison du ton adopté par l'auteur, qui évite de nombreux écueils associés au genre du témoignage. J'ai eu l'impression de côtoyer cette homme pendant un long moment, et je ferme le livre en l'abandonnant aux fantômes de sa famille. À suggérer aux amateurs de *true crime*, mais aussi à ceux et celles qui s'intéressent à l'impact de la violence et de la criminalité dans une famille. Certainement une de mes lectures les plus marquantes de cette année.

Diann Blakely says

If I had a “ten-best” list of memoirs, near the top would surely be Mikal Gilmore’s **SHOT IN THE HEART**, his searing account of growing up as Gary Gilmore’s brother. The two siblings lived parallel existences in the “blood-atonement” culture of the Mormon west, raised by two violent and abusive parents who seemed to hate not only each other, but at times, their own children. Gary Gilmore went on to gain notoriety as the first man to be executed after the reinstatement of the death penalty in this country; his brother led a life that saw him chasing darkness through music and then writing about it, most prominently for **ROLLING STONE** (see his recent review of Dylan’s **TELL-TALE SIGNS**). His first collection, the 1998 **NIGHT BEAT**, though still less well known than the earlier memoir, which won the National Book Award, was a more-than-memorable group of essays about the noir side of rock’n’roll, and his new work, **STORIES DONE: WRITINGS ON THE 1960s AND ITS DISCONTENTS** (much of which appeared in the magazine) dances in the shadows that lined the rainbow-hued 1960s. No, we don’t necessarily need another book about that much-storied decade, but Gilmore’s take is new, finding “hard limits and bad faith” in the soi-disant Summer of Love, especially at its epicenter, a Haight-Ashbury which he saw full of tourists and stoned-out runaways, a danger zone where confrontations with police were merely a foreboding of worse things to come, from Tet to Altamont to the 1970 death of Jimi Hendrix.

I rarely, rarely, rarely award stars of any sort to living writers, for I don’t like ranking books any more than I liked grading papers; furthermore, I religiously (so to speak) purge my bookshelves, but Gilmore’s work is genuinely stellar and has a permanent place in my library. The LA Book Award and the NBCC are only two of the many well-deserved prizes it garnered.

Janet says

One of a handful of nonfiction works I will always remember, as if it is branded inside of me, I keep *Shot in the Heart* on the shelf alongside James Ellroy's *My Dark Places*--made me understand in many ways the darkest heart of America. Mikal Gilmore tells the story of his murderer brother, Gary Gilmore, the last person executed by firing squad in America, for the murder of two hotel clerks in Provo Utah, which he demanded, as a way of 'blood atonement'--part of the family's strict Mormon code. A western story, an American story, how one home had created two such damaged men, but in two completely different ways--beyond darkness. The intensity of the violence and emotion still is alive in me, years after.

Tim Healy says

"All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." - Leo Tolstoy

When I started this book, I expected it to be a memoir of Gary Gilmore's life and death written by his brother Mikal. I was only kind of right, which is just a different way to say I was wrong. What Gilmore has done is both more difficult, and I believe more painful.

Mikal is a good writer of non-fiction. He's clear and concise without skimping on detail. He knows a lot of the details here first-hand, and has found a lot more. As a youngest child, born in 1951 when Gary was already almost 12 years old. He was too young while both were living in the family home to have really understood what his brother was up to. The family dynamic didn't help, either.

The Gilmore parents were unstable Mom was a devout Mormon who was willing to fight with, but not cross her husband. Dad was a hard drinking con artist with a lot of prison time who was almost 30 years her senior. Family life for the boys consisted of rules that could never be met, and beatings at the times they were broken. Gary and Gaylen both wandered into lives of theft that descended into death; Gaylen by natural causes. Gary descended into crime, violence, and then murder.

Lost in the wake of this destruction were Mikal and his oldest brother Frank. They survived, but are scarred. And they have now bonded in a way that they couldn't when their parents and brothers were still alive.

This is a remarkable book. It's very well written. It's harrowing, though, and would not be everyone's cup of tea. Take that into consideration prior to reading it.

Tolstoy's quote may be the best review of this book that could be offered.
