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No Angel: My Harrowing Undercover Journey to the Inner Circle of the Hells Angels by Jay Dobyns and Nils Johnson-Shelton, Crown, 2009

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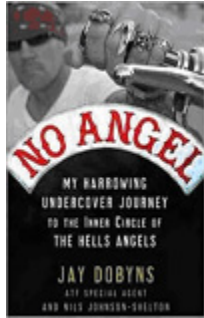
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No Angel: My Harrowing Undercover Journey to the Inner Circle of the Hells Angels

by Jay Dobyns and Nils Johnson-Shelton, Crown, 2009

Reviewed by J. Rocky Colavito

No Angel is a heart-wrenching chronicle of one man's dark night of the soul, and a welcome addition to the ranks of crime and crime fighting memoirs. Dobyns, a former college football player, survives being shot in the chest on one of his first assignments, recovers, and is subsequently drafted into Operation Black Biscuit, a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms undercover operation targeting the Hells Angels. Dobyns sinks himself, mind and body, into the job, gaining the confidence of the very objects of his investigation and insinuating himself into the inner circles of the motorcycle gang.

The memoir reveals Dobyns's growing fascination with the outlaw life, playing it off against the tensions with his wife. The ultimate irony is that the investigation doesn't "take down" the Hells Angels, and Dobyns's methods are subsequently called to question by lawyers and the ATF. Dobyns is ostensibly cashiered from the ATF because of the baggage he acquires from the experience. He now lives with the loss of the personal and professional lives he knew, along with the recurring death threats against himself and his family from the very souls whose confidence he curried and whose lives entranced him.

Dobyns chronicles the activities of the Hells Angels with the same meticulous eye and unwavering forthrightness that he turns upon his own growing addictions to adrenaline highs and Hydroxycut, leaving the reader to ponder the scars left by what he put himself through. Arresting throughout, I couldn't put it down.

- J. Rocky Colavito is professor of English and Director of Writing Programs at Butler University.