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# Acrobaddict



## Synopsis

Follow the author as he goes on a harrowing journey from the US Olympic Training Center to homeless shelters to shooting heroin on the job to being declared dead. This story goes beyond addiction. It is about the fragility and tenacity of the human spirit and how that spirit can redeem each and every one of us by helping to push us through the darkness, whether the darkness is from death, divorce, or the disease of addiction. *Acrobaddict* is a story about the close relationship between athletics and drug addiction; how the same energy, obsession, and dedication that can create an Olympic athlete can also create a homeless drug addict.

**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**  
(Starred review) After reading former Olympic gymnastics hopeful Putignano's sinister yet intoxicating memoir of addiction, recovery, and more addiction, you wind up feeling like one of his closest friends. The first-time author, who now portrays Crystal Man in Cirque du Soleil's traveling production of *Totem*, divulges what must be nearly every significant detail of his journey from the basement of his parents' Massachusetts home, where as an 8-year-old he taught himself flips using old couch cushions; to the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, where the author's insane quest for perfection exposed his insecurities and triggered his self-loathing; and finally to a seemingly never-ending series of addict escapades throughout his college and post-college years that somehow did not even climax after he was twice declared clinically dead. Putignano's homosexuality plays a crucial role in his story, and it is the one topic here he handles delicately. Elsewhere, his prose is unfiltered: graphic and intimate. Prone to hyperbole to the point of distraction, Putignano nevertheless writes so vividly about his highs that readers practically experience them with him. Similarly, his lows drop them into the private circles of hell on earth he created. A more powerful anti-drug missive would be tough to find. (Sept.)

**LIBRARY JOURNAL** (July 22, 2013) Dale Farris, Groves, TX; Former star acrobatic contortionist and gymnast of the Cirque du Soleil's *Totem* performer in Twyla Tharp's musical *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, and guest on Dr. Sanjay Gupta's CNN show *Human Factor*, Putignano, shares his heartfelt, emotionally wrenching story of addiction to heroin. Putignano's memoir takes readers on an unsettling journey from his experience in the U.S. Olympic Training Center to homeless shelters to shooting heroin on the job, and even being declared dead. His vivid, brutally honest story begins with his realizing at an early age his innate talent for gymnastics, followed by his obsession with becoming an Olympic gymnastic champion, how he abandoned his Olympic hopes to chase his love of heroin, and ultimately how he managed to overcome his addiction and move into long-term recovery and stability. The narrative is replete with colorful descriptions of his many harrowing experiences, and deep musings that have formed

the foundation for his commitment to remain free of drugs and a shining light for others who may be seeking guidance. VERDICT Putignano's honest memoir of drug abuse is a valuable addition to substance-abuse literature. His status as a successful gymnast and performer helps connect readers, and his impressive, erudite style results in a highly credible addition to this rapidly saturating genre.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

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I read this memoir in the span of two days - which says something of its power. This isn't an easy book to read, though. He really does take us on a tour of what his hell looked and felt like. I felt exhausted by the time I reached the final page! That he had both the discipline and skill to write this memoir speaks eloquently to his character as a man. And, yet, I find myself wanting more because I have so many questions about how he found redemption and stayed the course of recovery. He speaks of the fear and self-hatred that became his enveloping demons and I wanted him to delve beneath skin and bones and explore in more nuance what those fears felt like. All through the journey, he met people who fell in love with him and believed in him and we're willing to suffer with and for him. But, I want to know why they were willing to do this - who is this Joe that they loved? In some respects, he does such a fine job of conveying what deformed his soul that I don't always glean how his innate goodness managed to spark even in darkness. I think I wanted the narrative of his journey into self-destruction to be tighter and of his journey into recovery more expansive. I was most moved in those sections where he reflects on what essentially is the sacred dimensions of his journey to becoming the man he was meant to be. I wanted even more of those insights as they

give his story its unique resonance. What I want, though, does not take away from what he gave us - a heroic story that sets before us the mystery of the human will and heart. I look forward to his next book - there's got to be a "next" book!

Joey's story, in a word, is heartbreakng. He takes you along his journey from childhood, through adolescent, and into adulthood. As you read, his words make you rise and fall with him. You find yourself rooting for him even when you know the darkness that lies around the next corner. You pray for him to find peace, love, and self acceptance. You wish that you were there for him in the early years, that you knew, that you could have done something to ease the pain. His dance with the devil is so captivating that you find yourself living each moment with him, like a friend instead of a reader. All who read this will not only desperately want to go back in time to support Joey but also pray that this next leg of his journey will find him in love, not necessarily with another, but with himself.

This book is way broader and deeper than the challenges/relationships of Olympic competing and substance addiction. The graphic details of repetitive and excessive substance abuse was staggering - hopefully it will be to most readers. However, woven and beautifully crafterd throughout the book were concepts that I believe everyone struggles with: 1) need for perfection 2) destructive and counter productive self-hatred 3) obsessing on things you can't change 4) constantly looking behind you instead of moving forward 5) the focus on intention behind your actions as opposed to whether the result was good or bad 6) constantly thinking and rethinking and the negative impact on emotions 7) life is full of pain 8) spiritual health and finally 9) the ability to accept and surrender (not the same as admitting defeat). The book is extremely well-written, raw and powerful - so much so that I couldn't put the book down for the last 150 pages on a cross-country flight. I was visibly sobbing on the plane as I read the book. Regardless of your spiritual, religious or moral beliefs, everyone could benefit from Joe's journey - a journey that we all are one and will continue to be

I couldn't put the book down, I bought it for the kindle and 25% of the way in I was already crying. I wanted to hug Joe and tell him don't worry I know this is all gonna work out in the end. You're young you need help. Its fine. Of course I couldn't hold the author and his former youth, but I felt like I was him. I saw some similarities in my youth and his youth all the way up. The author was kind of a loner in high school, didn't have a lot of friends because he was introverted, and was shy. He was introduced to drugs by one of his close best friends and it all spiraled down hill from there. There

were times I wanted to shake the author and just scream WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS? YOU'RE HURTING THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE YOU!!!! Then I would want to sob and say I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH I'M SO SORRY JUST HANG IN THERE!! Everything from the doctor office visits, the feelings of the highs and the pain of cutting were all wonderfully detailed and left no doubt in how the author was feeling at that time. I loved the writing style and the raw, brutal honesty of it all, and just found the author to be a delightful person and down to earth and very nice. (I of course had to email him and tell him what an amazing book he had and thank him for sharing his story). If you haven't bought it yet just jump and do it. You'll love the book, at least I did. I highly recommend this book to anyone and everyone. I remember one point in the book where Joe was in the hospital and asked the nurse (after he had just OD'D) where the nearest homeless shelter was and she was a very cruel woman, although she never said anything hurtful the look in her eyes and her actions were louder than words. I will never look at drug addicts the same way. Sometimes you forget that they are someones sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers. Sometimes people just need a little extra help.

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