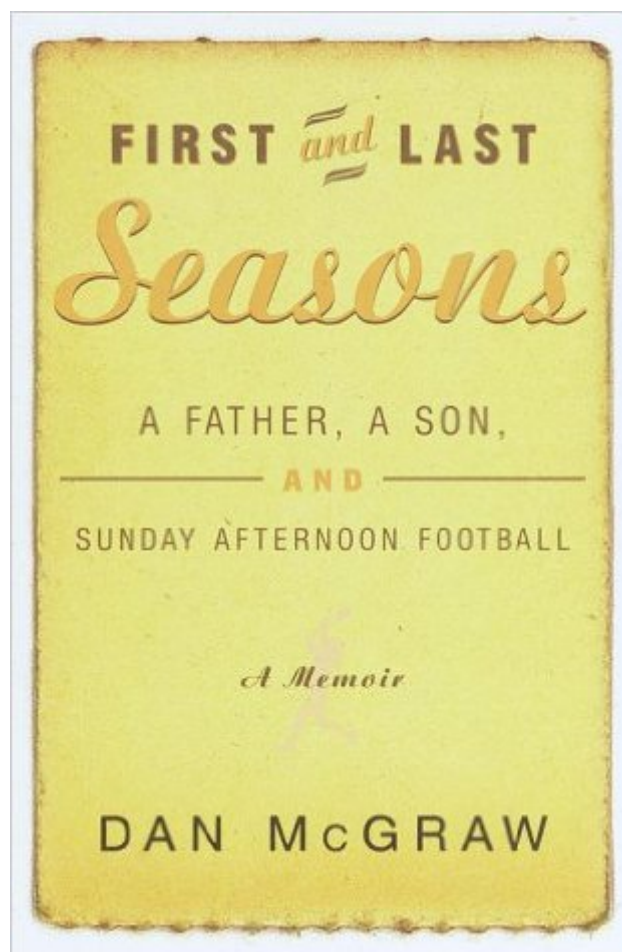


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First And Last Seasons: A Father, A Son, And Sunday Afternoon Football



Synopsis

Reminiscent of Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes* and James Dodson's *Final Rounds*, *First and Last Seasons* is not only a courageously confessional memoir but a work of resounding originality—a Rust Belt requiem for a father written by the black sheep son he leaves behind. Dan McGraw did not plan to go home to help his father die. To the thirty-nine-year-old Texas-based senior editor for *U.S. News & World Report*, Cleveland, Ohio, was a million miles away. Dan was the prodigal middle son within a large Irish-Catholic family, and life never really got going until he was far away from the city and his dominant father, Richard. But the gravitational pull of his hometown grew stronger as each year passed by. The final tug home came when the NFL announced that the Cleveland Browns football franchise would be resurrected for the 1999-2000 season. All McGraws and Clevelanders are die-hard Sunday afternoon football fans, and Dan decided to take a leave of absence and cover the Browns' first season. Soon thereafter, Richard was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Dan came home to a press pass and the caretaking chores for a father intent on dying the way he lived, on his own terms. *First and Last Seasons* is a heart-wrenching work about fathers and sons, the binding influence of community, and how emotionally disconnected men find a common language in sports. It is also a poignantly funny and charming celebration of one man's life and how his sacrifices and mistakes helped his son find the best part of himself. A beautifully written, intensely personal story, this cathartic chronicle of how Dan participated in his father's final season is sure to speak to the millions of fathers and sons who have trouble finding the voice to express their love for one another.

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Customer Reviews

I bought it a week ago, I couldn't put it down and tonight I went to the author's signing at the local mall. If you're from Cleveland and you follow sports, if you're a fan of the grit and character of the Old Browns, if you've ever lost a loved one who had a shared memory of sports with you, this book is a keeper. I was first in line tonight and Dan's face was glowing red as he signed my book:

"Thanks for being #1." The book is funny, brutally honest and an east sider's analysis of why things are the way they are in Cleveland. The author is a wild, yarn spinning, beer chugging Irishman who's father smirks right back on death when it smiles on him. I know I'll pick this up again next fall and possibly every fall because it's a piece of history. Dan doesn't paint an optimistic picture of the future of the Browns, but hey, us Clevelanders have embraced losing for decades. We can handle the truth!

This is kind of the anti-Morrie. Nothing against that book, but this is not a warm and fuzzy kind of story. It's very unsentimental, and more effective because of that. IF you're not into honesty, don't read this--it's easily the most honest look at a father-son relationship I've ever read, and I've read a lot of them. So many American men and their fathers have a curiously aloof relationship, often based on doing things together instead of talking and sharing feelings . . . and sports is often one of those activities. I think almost every guy in America will identify with Dan McGraw and his memorable and terminally ill dad, who, when his son tells him he's writing a book about the two of them, asks, "When would it be good for me to die? You know, for the book?" The process of McGraw making peace with his father, with the "expansion" Cleveland Browns' season in the background, is by turns awkward, painful, corrosively funny (there's no shortage of drinking and profanity here), and beautiful. The elder McGraw is simply one of the most unforgettable characters I've ever read about. I just can't recommend this book highly.

I didn't think it possible that anyone could really describe what it was like to grow up in the small Cleveland suburb of Euclid, Ohio, and how it feels to return there as an adult. But Dan McGraw has done just that. Cleveland has been referred to as 'the Land of Oz,' and Dan McGraw's book gives the reader a bitter-sweet taste of what it means to be called a 'Clevelander.' Although I don't personally know Dan McGraw, I grew up right on the Lake Erie lakefront about a mile from where he and his family lived. His accurate, colorful descriptions of the locations and people in and around the Cleveland area are right on the mark. The book really 'tells it like it is' when one is faced with the illness and death of a parent, and one's identity as it relates to their parents and their

neighborhood. What is it like going back to your old neighborhood and finding things have changed but yet remain the same? It is an interesting paradox that really comes out in the story, as does Dan McGraw's attitude as he experiences a myriad of mixed emotions toward life and the city he both loved and hated. It is a book certainly everyone can identify with, and forces one to raise questions about their own experiences with family and friends, as well as one's upbringing. The book expresses the feeling held by many Clevelanders that growing up in the city by the lake was depressing yet exhilarating, dull yet exciting, comforting yet agitating. Don't miss this interesting biography of a man who saw through to the inner meaning of what it is to be a son, a father, a caregiver, and a resident of what has got to be the strangest, most unique area in America.

Dan McGraw returns to his hometown to write about the return of a Cleveland Browns team. Somewhat a prodigal son, he also returns to a father dying of cancer. This is the anti-Morrie book, the story of a father and son who didn't ever seem to remain on common ground for long, and their coming to grips with death and their differences. It is not a feel good book, it is filled with depression, fear, profanity, pain, drinking and self examination seems to be closer to self-loathing at times. It is the story of a father and son and the differences that could completely tear them apart, and the compassion and struggle that binds them. It is an honest book, the feelings expressed by McGraw about seeing his father laid out for the wake and the confusion, relief and anger that accompany the grief of death ring true. Paralell to this story is the story of the Browns struggle to reestablish their place in pro football...not a pretty sight.

In Tom Brockaw's Greatest Generation he details the personal accomplishments of the World War II generation. In Dan McGraw's First and Last Seasons one of their progeny reflects on their role as parents. Not surprisingly, you wouldn't find WW II vets sipping chardonnay, or sitting about a campfire connecting with their inner self and their offspring. These stoic, hardworking folks never read self help books, and their favored form of communication was action: they led by example. At its worst this might include racism, sexism, homophobia, and alcoholism. And perhaps, at its best, there were the shared thrills and disappointments of professional football. Alternating dark/ brooding and hilariously funny this is a wonderful memoir for those middle-aged offspring of that epoch. Ultimately Mr. McGraw is enlightened by the fact that, like himself (ourselves), the Greatest Generation at least tried to be at their best as parents. As a kid, you can't really ask or expect anything more.

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