



## Drop Dead Healthy: One Man's Humble Quest for Bodily Perfection

By A.J. Jacobs

(Simon & Schuster \$26.00)

REVIEW BY STEFAN LONCE

I told you in my previous reviews of 2 of his books that A.J. Jacobs makes his readers laugh... and makes them think. To that I can now add that A.J. Jacobs's books are also good for you.

In his latest tome, *Drop Dead Healthy*, A.J. decided to improve his health after pneumonia landed him in the hospital while on a Caribbean vacation. It worked...as Billy Crystal would have said, A.J. looks marvelous!

On May 15, 2012, you see, I finally met A.J. at a literary event. A.J. spoke about how he learned to live healthier by flossing, by really, really chewing his food, by stimulating his libido with a cucumbers-and-candy scent he created himself, and by exercising, religiously, by writing his book while walking on a slowly moving "treadmill desk."

A.J. rocked! He made a room full of book-lovers want to read *Drop Dead Healthy*.

As I previously told you, A.J. Jacobs is a practitioner of a literary form of reality TV: He embarks on a *Personal Quest* ("PQ"), and then he writes about the PQ in a memoir-ish humor book that makes readers laugh... and makes them think.

Because A.J.'s books have been derided, by some, as "stunt books," he recently defended his genre in an article, "In Defense of Literary Stunts" in *Esquire Magazine*, "Yes, I am a stuntman.... Critics blast stunts as manufactured and contrived...[but] they are the tools of enlightenment itself!"

I agree! Here's what I wrote in the August 2010 *Montauk Sun*:

"Jacobs's PQ's are the latest incarnation of an old American literary art form: Henry David Thoreau was an early PQ practitioner, who spent a year living in a tiny cabin in the woods, which he wrote about in *Walden*. Upton Sinclair got jobs in meatpacking plants, whose unsanitary and dangerous working conditions he exposed in *The Jungle*. These PQ books work because they tell great stories in a compelling way; we root for the author/protagonist to succeed because ... the PQ is fun, or shocking, or enlightening, or some combination thereof."

In fact, A.J. inspired me to realize that **LCNS2ROM – LICENSE TO ROAM**, the vanity license plates book I am working on, should be a memoir, subtitled, **MY PERSONAL QU3ST 2 VANITIZE THE USA & CANADA2!** ("AJJACOBS" will be a chapter in **LCNS2ROM!**)

The problem with *Personal Quests* is that they're personal; they work only if readers, or TV viewers, root for the *Personal Quest-er* to succeed. A.J. tried a TV sitcom, but it didn't work because he agreed to let his penultimate book, originally entitled *The Guinea Pig Diaries*, be retitled as *My Life as an Experiment*, and made into a TV sitcom.

A.J.'s TV show would have succeeded if it had been a reality TV show, starring A.J. and his real-life family. That's because A.J. Jacobs, in person, makes you laugh...and makes you think, unlike an actor who portrays a caricature of the real A.J. for a TV sitcom.

Here is the Q+A from my latest interview with A.J. Jacobs ([ajjacobs.com](http://ajjacobs.com)):

**Name the single aspect of your life that you changed most as a result of what you learned while working on *Drop Dead Healthy* ("DDH")**

*I got off my butt. I could sit for 16 hours straight no problem. But I was shocked by all the research on how bad sitting at your desk is for your heart. So I move around. I get up from my chair, I pace, I hold meetings standing up, I run errands (literally)*

**In DDH you wrote a lot about eating, but hardly anything about cooking. Do you cook?**

*I do cook. Badly. But I do it. It's the healthiest way to prepare food, of course. I will say I'm proud of the kale chips I make. My kids don't know it's good for them.*

**In DDH you wrote, "Sitting is worse for you than a Paula Deen glazed bacon donut," referring to the Food Network's bad-for-you cooking star who recently revealed that while pushing her fat and sugar-laden concoctions on TV, she was secretly suffering from diabetes. What do you think about Paula Deen?**

*Well, I don't know her personally. I'm sure she's a good person. But it'd be nice if she would whip up a salad once in awhile. One with lettuce and other green stuff; molasses and lard dressing on the side, please.*

**In DDH you wrote, "I still eat eggs and salmon. But I don't eat beef, pork or lamb." Do you eat chicken? How long has it been since you last tasted filet mignon? Do you think that you would ever rejoin the meat-eaters?**

*I eat chicken occasionally, not too much. My last steak was two years ago. Esquire magazine -- where I'm a writer -- was doing a big story on steak, and wanted me to go to Peter Luger [steakhouse] in Brooklyn to see how it felt to eat a steak after 20 years of red meat abstinence. I got to say, it tasted good going down. But once in my stomach, it wreaked all kinds of havoc.*

**In DDH you wrote about how important flossing is to your health. How many times each day are you flossing now, and how important do you think that is to your health?**

*I floss once a day, which is once a day more than I used to. Flossing is certainly good for your health. Some claim that it helps prevent heart disease, though a new study just came out disputing that finding. Regardless, I remain a flosser.*

**Are you still using your treadmill desk?**

*Absolutely! I'm writing this on the treadmill desk. It has taken about half a mile to write these answers.*

**You can buy *Drop Dead Healthy* at [SimonandSchuster.com](http://SimonandSchuster.com)**