

book club

Page Turner

David Sedaris speaks to Flare.com on writing, the art of good taste and Karl Lagerfeld



Author David
Sedaris

David Sedaris' most recent collection of essays, *When You Are Engulfed in Flames*, is like literary prozac. With its cast of infinitely tacky characters (such as a loud-mouthed neighbor named Helen and a crude babysitter named Ms. Peacock), the book is a perfect anecdote to all the gloomy economical news fatiguing the newspapers. Flare.com sat down with the best-selling author so that he could answer a few fast ones.

By *Elio Iannacci*

FLARE: Do you think writing is something you can learn or do you think writers are just born that way?

David Sedaris: I'm on the fence about it. I mean, if you're going to work everyday, at whatever what you do—if you're a writer and you read a lot or you're an artist and you are looking at people's paintings—you're going to get better. Although... whenever anyone tells me they're going to graduate school for writing I can only say, don't do it. You'd be better off becoming a prostitute or having some kind of an adventure during that period that you can write about later on. You'd be better off living.

FLARE: Is it hard to keep disciplined and write every day?

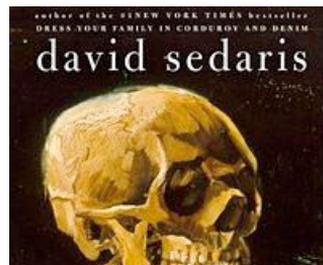
DS: I've always been good about doing the exact same thing at the exact same time every day. At 20, I was hitchhiking and writing to people, but they couldn't write me back because I didn't have an address. I wrote on the back of placemats, like a diary, and finally got a little hardcover book it just sort of became what I did. Every morning I'd wake up and I'd write in my diary.

FLARE: Do you mostly write in the morning?

DS: Yes. I used to write in the evening while I was getting drunk, but then I quit drinking, so I started writing in the morning. And so now I get up and go right to work. For years I started writing and drinking and smoking right around the same time. I would write and then drink—drinking was my reward. So when I quit drinking that was hard and I thought, 'ok how will I write?' But it wasn't that hard, actually. It was harder when I quit smoking.

FLARE: There is a story in *When You Are Engulfed in Flames* that centers on a hilarious woman named Helen—who seems like one of the most difficult people in the world. Did you censor some of Helen's past for the sake of the story?

DS: I have so much stuff on Helen in my diary, but I did leave a lot of it out because I wanted people to *like* her. She disinherited her son over 20 dollars, said some really catty things and did some *really* naughty things but I knew that in the amount of time that I was writing about her if I had mentioned any of those things, then a reader probably would not forgive her. When I read about Helen in



New York or New Jersey, everybody knows someone *like* her so they forgive her. But reading about her in the South or in California, people say 'why were you friends with that horrible person?' and I'd think 'what horrible person?'



FLARE: Would you say that you have good taste?

DS: I have really bad taste. Especially when it comes to art. I'll think 'oh, that's fantastic,' and then I'm always amazed when people don't comment when they see whatever I've purchased. My Dad is still convinced that he's got the greatest taste on Earth. There's this woman I know [named Laurie Rosenwald] who illustrates a lot of my work at *The New Yorker* and she's writing a book right now called *All the Wrong People Have Self Esteem*. And I think it's true. There are plenty of people with much worse taste than mine and they're so confident about what they like.

FLARE: Speaking of taste, my next interview will be with Karl Lagerfeld. What do you think of his taste?

DS: It's surprising. I enjoyed the documentary on him [*Lagerfeld Confidential*] and I liked him a lot more than I thought I was going to. I guess we need to believe that someone like that is just basically shallow but there was a lot more to him than I thought. I know someone else who interviewed him and Karl Lagerfeld said, 'What do you think you're going to ask me that I haven't been asked a million times before?'

FLARE: Are you on Facebook?

DS: I saw the Internet for the first time this past September. I had never before seen the Internet before! I was going on tour and the guy who was producing the show said, 'do you want to see what our hotel looks like?' And he showed me on the computer. One day, somebody told me, 'Oh I looked at your My Space page,' and I said, 'what are you talking about? I don't have one of those.' Apparently a person made a facebook page up for me. So I paid a nerd 50 dollars to make it go away.

FLARE: You've lived in so many cities. Which one is the easiest to live in?

DS: New York. When I go back to New York or even when I'm in America I feel like I understand it, I know what the rules are. I can navigate it. Even though I don't want to live there. I like being a foreigner. I felt more at ease in Tokyo than I have ever felt in France.

FLARE: How alike are you to your sister?

DS: We're very much alike, but I'm not a physical presence. Do you know what I mean? I'm not comfortable on television. I'm fine in front of people if I have a piece of paper and I'm reading, or if I'm answering questions after a reading, but I'm not at ease in my body the way that she is. But other than that we're very alike, we find the same things funny.