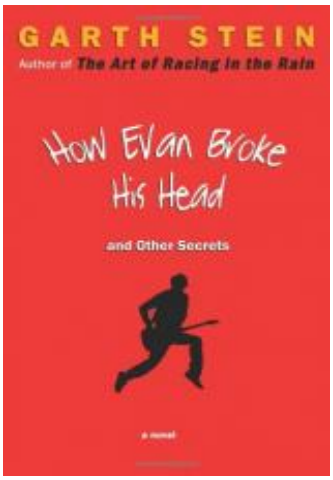
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How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets

by Garth Stein



About the Book

Fathers never forget seeing their kids for the first time. But Evan is greeting his son, Dean, fourteen years late. The boy had been shuttled secretly to another city, along with his teenaged mother, while still a newborn. Now his mother has passed away, and Evan is it --- Dad. An instant single parent.

Instead of smiles and gurgles, Dean is full of snarls and resentment. Little wonder. So Evan must win over his teenaged child or forever suffer the guilt of having failed his son. In the process, he has to contend with his own uptight Anglo-Saxon paterfamilias. Also his chosen work --- rock musician.

Evan, thirty-one, is the one-time lead guitarist for a hot group with a hit single. Except that was then, this is now. At present, he is a sometime guitar instructor for middle-aged guys trying to coax funky sounds from their electrics. Or else doing menial work in a music shop. Hardly the stuff of dreams or success.

Dean changes everything. Evan can't keep drifting now that he's a responsible father. He will have to do something about his life if he's going to provide for the two of them. Partly it will mean facing his own father, at long last. Mostly it means facing up to himself and a nagging, burning issue that is like a hole in his soul --- the epilepsy that haunts him and threatens his every moment.

Discussion Guide

1. "The truth is in the eyes of he who tells it, so what good is it, anyway?" One of the questions raised in the novel concerns the reliability of memory. Evan is sometimes unsure of his memories of how things happened; other characters feel more sure. Regarding the story of how Evan broke his head, who is telling the real story, Evan or Charlie? How do you think the accident happened? How did the differing interpretations of the event change the lives of those involved? What other secrets in the novel have more than one possible "truth?"

2. "People make up stories about themselves, Dean," Evan says.... "And then they try to make those stories come true." What does Evan mean by this comment at the end of the book? How has Evan let stories he has about himself drive his life? How has he let stories other people have about him drive his life? How have the new relationships in his life (Mica and Dean) affected his thinking on the matter?

3. Abandoning a child is a serious matter. How does Evan grapple with what happened between Tracy and Dean and himself? Does he feel victimized or guilty, or both? Is there a parallel between "how it happened" that Evan was left out of Dean's upbringing and "how it happened" that Evan broke his head?

4. Garth Stein uses a narrative voice with a very limited third person p.o.v., rarely letting the reader out of Evan's head: all values and commentary are filtered through Evan's thoughts. How does this reflect the theme of truth in the novel? How reliable are Evan's judgments? Should we believe everything Evan thinks?

5. Evan has a rare form of epilepsy called status epilepticus, which can result in death if a generalized seizure goes untreated. How does he cope with the seriousness of his affliction? How do his parents cope with it? Why is he so reluctant to share information about his epilepsy with other people? How does his reluctance affect those relationships?

6. Evan's relationship with his son is non-existent. One might argue that his relationship with his father, Carl, is also non-existent, even though Carl took part in Evan's upbringing. Why? How does Evan feel about his relationship with his father? In the end, how does he resolve that relationship?

7. Evan feels safe on stage when he's making music. What role does music play in the novel? Why did Evan choose to pursue a profession in music rather than a more predictable, dependable job? Why has Evan had such struggles with his own talent and success up to this point? (Hint: when Evan tells stories about himself, does he see himself as successful or a failure? How might his own attitude affect the outcome of his stories?) Do you agree with Evan that the opportunity with his current band, "The Last," is his only chance at success? Or do you believe, like Mica, that Evan will always be able to find talented musicians to work with?

8. Do you have any stories you tell yourself about yourself? If so, how do they influence your life?

9. Do you allow yourself to be influenced by stories other people --- family or old friends --- have about you? Have you ever found yourself trying to "live down" a reputation? Was that reputation warranted or unwarranted?

10. What's the deal with Lars?

Author Bio

Garth Stein is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling novel THE ART OF RACING IN THE RAIN, published in 35 languages. He is also the author of two previous novels, HOW EVAN BROKE HIS HEAD AND OTHER SECRETS and RAVEN STOLE THE MOON. He lives in Seattle with his family.

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Critical Praise

"A compelling tale...."

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