

Frazier writes about the tucked-away pockets of American life

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In the age of the 24-hour news cycle where most reports are re-reports of what every other news outlet is currently reporting on, Ian Frazier's reporting is refreshing. It might be unfair to the ubiquitous news cycle and Frazier to compare one to the other, but in "Hogs Wild: Selected Reporting Pieces," Frazier puts readers in touch with the everyman and woman, lowbrow and highbrow society alike and just about everything in between.

Frazier writes about the tucked-away pockets of American life and beyond, including the forgotten or little-known places. His topics include the more than 1,000,000 marginalized homeless in New York City and Charles Manson's desert hideaway on the Barker ranch in Death Valley. Although Harvard-educated, he has an affinity for the blue-collar and working poor, writing sometimes in the tradition of Studs Terkel and Mark Twain. Frazier is concerned with the questions, not grand summations of providing thinly veiled advocacy through answers. He eschews the perceived wisdom and allows the subject matter to unfold.

In "The Rap," Frazier delves into the world of hip-hop-related crimes and the sometimes violent symbiosis of those in and around the industry in New York City and the actual music itself. The piece centers on Derrick Parker, the "hip-hop cop," who "probably knows more about crimes in the rap and hip-hop community than anybody but the perpetrators themselves," writes Frazier. Of all the sordid, trite places Frazier could have taken this piece, he instead draws an artful parallel in style, respect and profession between Parker and his late grandfather, Willie Bryant. Bryant, at the twilight of his career, MC'd shows at the Apollo in a flawless and unusual manner, introducing every individual in the band by name, all the while never losing the audience's attention, according to Frazier.

"That's sort of what Derrick does, too. There's this cool nighttime world, and he's part of it, and everybody in it is, if not necessarily good, at least worth knowing about," Frazier writes. " 'I don't care who they are,' " Derrick says. " 'I don't talk down to anybody.' "

It's difficult to sum up Frazier's writing up in three- and four-line quotes. With a dry and informative humor, more inquisitive than cynical, he makes his point by pages, not paragraphs, wrapping you in the atmosphere of whatever situation he's exploring. He is empathetic, invested in his subject's experience, and I sense that he's able to elicit more for the overall story, even more from his subjects, because of his approach.

In one of the more touching pieces, “The One That Got Away” — part eulogy, part ode, part obituary — Frazier reflects on a fishing trip he takes with late famed angler guide Joe Randolph on Oregon’s Deschutes River. Up in the middle of the night to relieve himself, Frazier bumps into Joe standing in the waist-high brush. “‘You too Bud?’” Joe asks “in a companionable tone.”

“Now, looking back, I believe that more was going on. I believe that what I saw was a ghost — an actual person who also happened to be a ghost, or who was contemplating being one,” Frazier writes. Joe committed suicide two months after the trip.

It’s not entirely accurate to call “Hogs Wild” as selected pieces, since the collection reads much more like a greatest hits over the past decade. I’m not sure any writer, or any self-respecting person of letters, would allow a collection of theirs to contain the words “greatest” and “hits” in earnest in the title, especially not Frazier (well, maybe someone from my generation, the Millennials). Not to take away from the hundreds of pieces that were not selected, but each of the 23 contained within are finely crafted, well-done pieces that lay down the hard line, as Charles Bukowski would say, but they’re flanked by a plethora of intriguing information and fascinating facts. Through the seemingly mundane, Frazier excavates the extraordinary and makes you want to keep reading.

Humor writer and journalist Ian Frazier has compiled his essays and short pieces in “Hogs Wild,” which he’ll talk about at ... [read more](#)

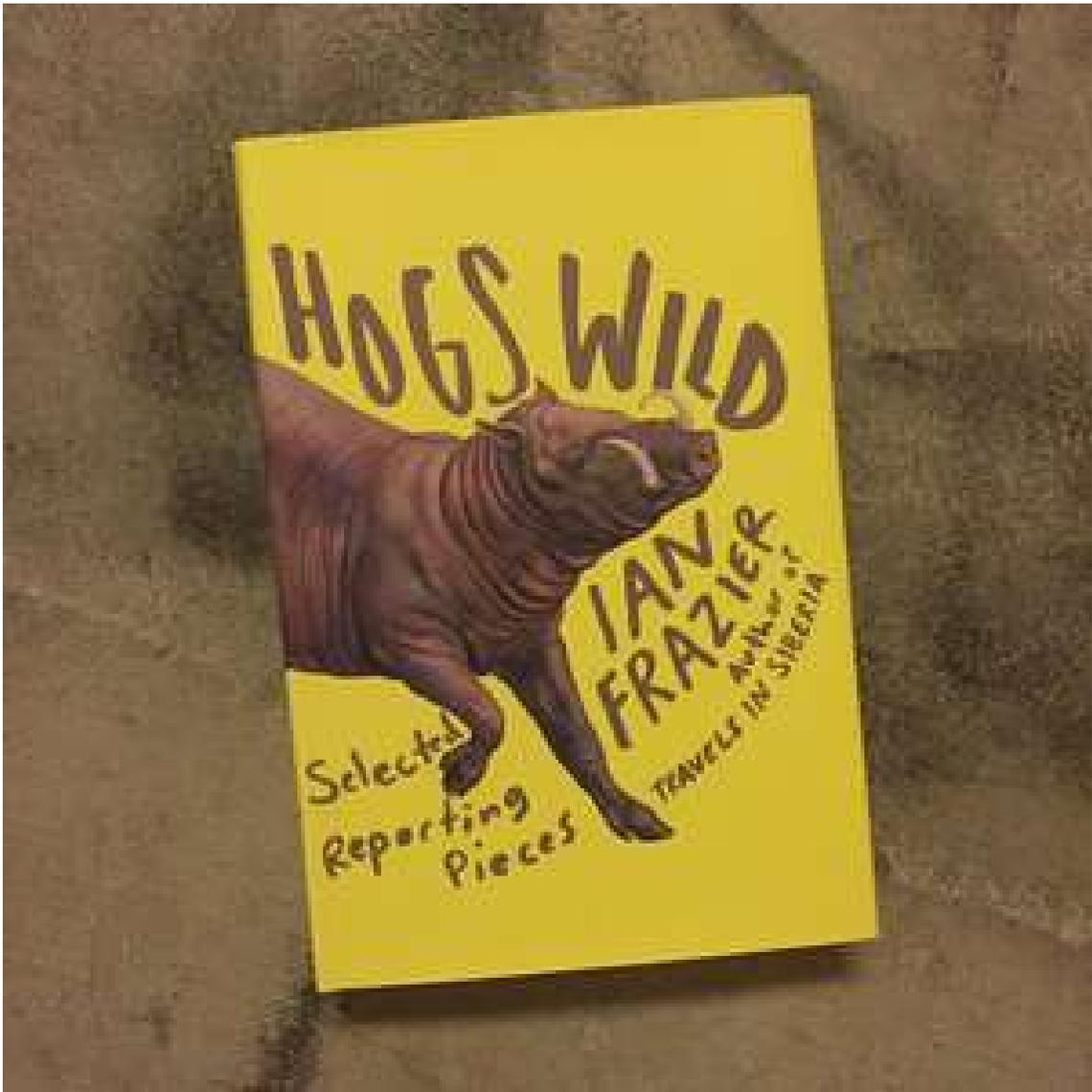
For all his digressive information-gathering, it is plain sincere talk that Frazier truly deals in and seems to respect the most from those he interviews. In “Blue Bloods,” the author finds himself chasing after the enigmatic horseshoe crab, speaking to individuals such as Glenn Gauvry, the head of an organization that makes claims to be the only one of its kind and whose goal is the preservation of the horseshoe crab. It makes sense that the author is drawn to the crab, which is really not a crab at all, but a survivor of 485 million years of epic changes.

“There’s a truth in horseshoe crabs that we must be attentive to,” Gauvry tells Frazier. “They’ve been around for half a billion years; the jury is still out on us.”



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"Hogs Wild," by Ian Frazier