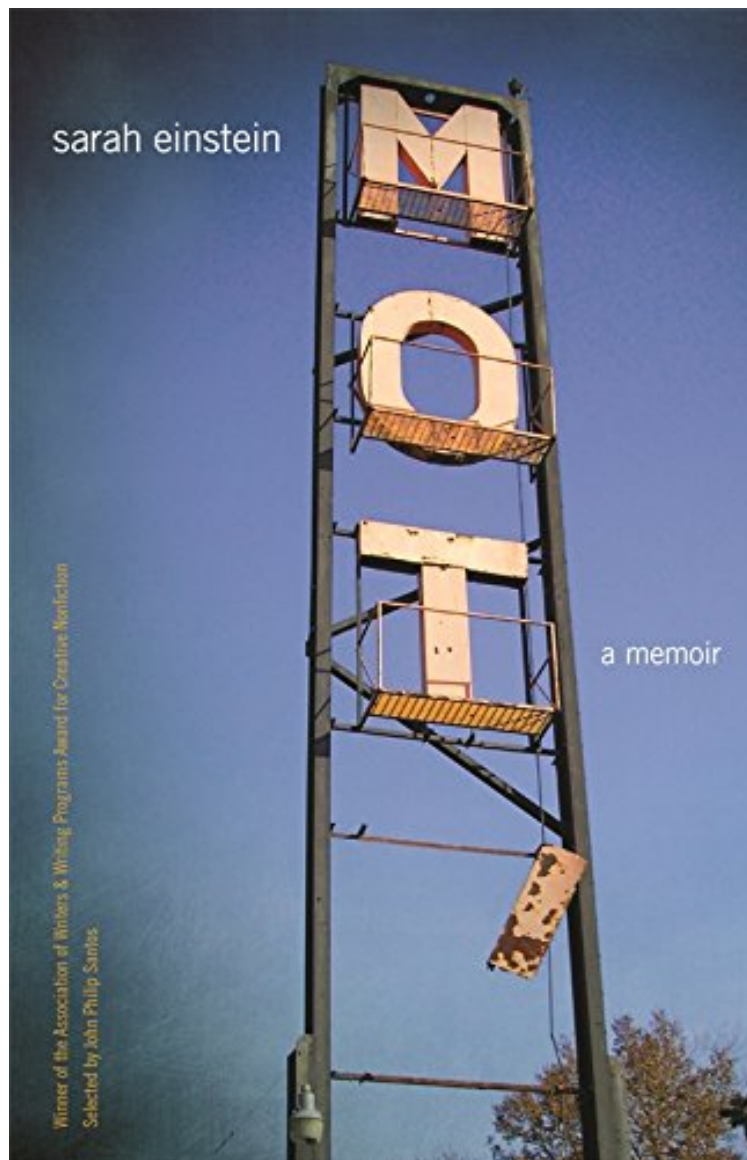


(Mobile book) Mot: A Memoir (Association of Writers and Writing Programs Award for Creative Nonfiction Ser.)

## Mot: A Memoir (Association of Writers and Writing Programs Award for Creative Nonfiction Ser.)

*Sarah Einstein*

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**Sarah Einstein : Mot: A Memoir (Association of Writers and Writing Programs Award for Creative Nonfiction Ser.)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mot: A Memoir (Association of Writers and Writing Programs Award for Creative Nonfiction Ser.):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A RAW, POWERFUL STORY OF A HOMELESS VETERAN IN WEST VIRGINIA By Hansen Alexander In 2011 Sarah Einstein was awarded the prestigious Pushcart Prize for small press, non-fiction. When you read "Mot" you can see why. With flawless style, a remarkable eye for detail, and gripping description, Einstein traces the decline of a homeless veteran with dementia at the same time her own marriage is imploding. With a large, giving heart that reminds one of literary giants who both shared their own genius and helped other writers and social causes, such as Victor Hugo, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, John Steinbeck, and Allen Ginsburg, Einstein tries to get into Mot's head to understand the mental suffering of a self-educated, self-reliant man who has spent the better part of 30 years sleeping outside in the cold. While the literary technique of comparing an author to other writers in a review has probably overstayed its welcome over the last 50 years, it is difficult not to see the honest, raw, confessional style of another Pushcart winner here, Kathy Acker. And Einstein is not a fan of Dickens, yet her vivid description of a homeless shelter, and the hopelessness of doing much for its transient clientele tugs at your heart as much as the cruelty of the industrial revolution described by Scrooge's creator. Ironically much of Mot's struggle takes place in West Virginia, the state of much of Michael Harrington's revelations about the poor that led to the war on poverty waged by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Indeed in an epilogue Einstein appeals directly to the reader to take an interest in the homeless problem as much as Dickens appealed in his journalism to the English public to correct the terrible conditions his novels portrayed. The deteriorated conditions Einstein describes with such vividness are not 19th century England, however, but rather 21st century America, where Crystal meth and crack have changed the shape of homelessness and rural poverty. Einstein describes a Morgantown shelter where most of the forty or so people were homeless junkies coming in to sleep or use the phone to make a drug connection. They are angry, violent homeless men and women who spend their days on the couches there watching television, playing cards, or sleeping. Typical of the men in the shelter is Wilbur, dying of stomach cancer, "a tumor the size of a bread loaf hanging over the belt of his pants. Wilbur's family had squatted on coal company land for three generations, living in the same tar-paper shack he had been reared in, working odd jobs, doing a little coal-mining, surviving mostly on hunting, growing a few vegetables, and a small Social Security check." At a time in which the political class, particularly the Republican Party and its corporate masters, has successfully brainwashed the public into believing that the only poverty in America is from people who do not work hard, Sarah Einstein has told the truth about poverty and the homeless, and revealed the political class for the frauds they are. After all, why is the funding to take care of the homeless so little? Why is the United States the only major industrial power, and the World's lone military Super Power, the only one with people sleeping in cars and on the cold ground of winter? With Mot, Einstein attaches herself to the conditions of his insanity, which comes and goes in what the law calls "lucid intervals," with admirable sensitivity. "The trick is this: Mot knows that much of what he believes is untrue, that logical inconsistencies distinguish the imagined from the real. It's not possible to attack the heart of his delusions, but the details can be changed if I'm clever and can find a glitch in the logic... Then he will believe the new, more complicated version of the untruth until a new delusion subsumes and alters the entire narrative of his life that his illness spins." Einstein invites the conclusion that we can find the truth by talking to and listening to the insane, a conclusion that goes back to Greek tragedy. Einstein also shows how healing-- in a strange way-- can be achieved in a relationship with the insane: there is something soothing and revealing about talking to somebody who may be deluded but is not full of guile and bullshit. The structure of the book takes Einstein back and forth between West Virginia and the dusty edges of west Texas in Amarillo. She writes, "I've traveled to Amarillo in part to get away from the difficulties at work and at home for a while and to burn up the vacation time and personal days accumulated over the last year. I know it's strange that the first new friend I've made in many years is a mentally ill, homeless man who is twenty-five years my senior... Scotti tries to be supportive, but he sees my quitting the job as a failure." Einstein essentially quit after being sexually assaulted. Her husband "thinks I've made too much of the attack and am using it as an excuse... Mot "treats my fear as genuine, not as self-indulgence. And I need that right now." [Hansen Alexander, a New York attorney, is author, most recently, of "An Introduction to the Laws of the United States in the 21st Century," an e-book exclusive.] 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Le Mot Juste By Taube Cyrus In 2011, Sarah Einstein's essay, Mot, originally published by the literary journal Ninth Letter in 2009, won a Pushcart Prize. It was a beautifully realized essay describing the author's friendship with a homeless veteran, Tom, who prefers to be referred to by the anagrammatic nomenclature, Mot. As much as I enjoyed that essay, the brevity of the format necessarily left questions unanswered, suspended in space. The resulting portrait of Mot was like the tenuous remnants of a cobweb after a rain: One had to imagine the larger essence of the man and of the author's friendship with the man. In a word? I wanted more. (Recognizing with an ancillary jouissance that mot in French means word.) All this is to say, that, Pushcart Prize notwithstanding, this Mot is, at least for me, the mot juste-- a more dimensional, more fleshed out account of a man who attempted friendship with another despite the dark and terrifying delusions of the mental illness he struggled with on a daily basis. In Einstein's intensely riveting portrait, friendship with Mot is personal and very real-- it is bowls of pho soup and apple pie in the back of a Camry. It is listening to "Car Talk" on National Public Radio and watching snippets of "Les Maitres Fous" on Youtube. Einstein's friendship with Mot is never construed as a rescue effort, a Messianic "klieg light" shining onto the darkness of mental illness, although it manages to offer small moments of

personal illumination whether by Mot or by the author herself: This is a day when complex problems might have simple solutions, when buying light bulbs at Walmart is a real victory at the darkness.<sup>3</sup> of 3 people found the following review helpful. ... commit to a friendship with a person who is intelligent, delusional By michele leavitt What do you get when you commit to a friendship with a person who is intelligent, delusional, grandiose, and terrified? Sarah Einstein's memoir explores her commitment to Mot, a man she meets during the course of her work managing a homeless shelter in West Virginia. As her friendship with Mot is tested by his eccentricity and her own fears, her marriage is tested on a parallel track. She treats both commitments with honesty, compassion, and more than a little self-awareness, but the main focus is on the friendship. Navigating this new kind of love, balancing her own needs for safety with the need to accept Mot's versions of reality, Einstein comes at last to a personal-is-political definition of friendship that will resonate with anyone who has cared about a person suffering from mental illness.

At forty, Sarah Einstein is forced to face her own shortcomings. In the wake of an attempted sexual assault, she must come to terms with the facts that she is not tough enough for her job managing a local drop-in center for adults with mental illness and that her new marriage is already faltering. Just as she reaches her breaking point, she meets Mot, a homeless veteran who lives a life dictated by frightening delusion. She is drawn to the brilliant ways he has found to lead his own difficult life; traveling to Romania to get his teeth fixed because the United States doesn't offer dental care to the indigent, teaching himself to use computers in public libraries, and even taking university classes while living out of doors. *Mot: A Memoir* is the story of their unlikely friendship and explores what we can, and cannot, do for a person we love. In unsparing prose and with a sharp eye for detail, Einstein brings the reader into the world of Mot's delusions and illuminates a life that would otherwise be hidden from us.

Struggling in her marriage and as director of a drop-in center for adults with mental illness, the author meets a delusional, sixty-five-year-old homeless man. A moving, fully human portrait of the surprising companionship that grows between them, *Mot* shows us that to save others is to save ourselves. (Marcia Aldrich author of *Companion to an Untold Story*) Sarah Einstein is a natural storyteller, and her careful portrait of her mentally ill, homeless friend Mot is unflinching. *Mot, A Memoir* is heartbreaking yet at times gently funny and always delivered with immense, startling compassion. An entirely captivating work of literary nonfiction. (Dinty W. Moore author of *Dear Mister Essay Writer Guy*) Sarah Einstein is a brave, compassionate writer, and in *Mot, A Memoir*, she honors a beautiful, honest friendship. (Rene E. D'Aoust Rain Taxi of Books) Beautifully written, *Mot* vividly evokes quotidian parking lots, campgrounds, and scenery and explores complicated, omnipresent moral questions about what it means to give, take, offer, need, and befriend in a way that will make it a reference point for me for years to come. (Zoe Zolbrod *The Rumpus*) *Mot* is not a story of pat answers or happy endings. It is, ultimately, a passionate and moving argument for looking beyond the assumptions that blind us to the humanity of the Mot's of this world. (Maria Browning Chapter 16) First-person narratives are sometimes dismissed as navel-gazing. Nothing could be further from the reality of Einstein's writing. In *Mot*, Einstein looks beyond herself and challenges us to do the same. From the opening scene to an epilogue providing concrete ways to improve conditions for marginalized individuals, *Mot* calls us to embrace humanity with the compassion Einstein herself extends. (Kim Kankiewicz *Colorado*) What shines, here, is Einstein's solid prose. The author has a firm grasp of her own emotions, which allows her to veer off with Mot's unintentional broken thoughts. This is a book that portrays illness in all of its sad disrepair. (Heather Scott Partington *Electric Literature*) With flawless style, a remarkable eye for detail, and gripping description, Pushcart Prize winner Sarah Einstein traces the decline of a homeless veteran with dementia at the same time her own marriage is imploding. . . (Hansen Alexander *The Florida Times-Union*) About the Author SARAH EINSTEIN is a doctoral candidate in creative nonfiction at Ohio University. Her work has appeared in journals such as *The Sun*, *Ninth Letter*, *PANK*, and *Fringe* and has been awarded a Pushcart Prize. She is also a special topics editor for *Brevity*.