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**Review of Poachers Were My Prey: Eighteen Years as an
Undercover Wildlife Officer, by W. H. "Chip" Gross**

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Poachers Were My Prey: Eighteen Years as an Undercover Wildlife Officer. By W.H. "Chip" Gross. Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2012. 202 pp. Paperback, \$19.95.

As a memoir, this is a detailed look into the daily life, and dangerous work, of undercover wildlife officer R.T. Stewart whose time with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division spanned eighteen years. Recounted through ten poaching operations, organized by chapters as such, and concluded with chapters on undercover training and reflections on his career--- and the lifestyle it creates, the descriptions draw the reader into face-to-face encounters with illegal hunting and killing of wildlife in the Midwestern United States.

Multiple references in the book to "living the lie" is Stewart's attempt to explain the deep involvement an officer must commit to in order to successfully bring to justice hardened poachers while also maintaining their cover (and safety). He describes strategies used to gain the trust of poachers:

To try to minimize the number of deer we were killing, Don [Stewart's partner] and I would often make intentional mistakes when poaching with the bad guys. When we first saw a deer, for example, we might make too much noise inside the vehicle as we approached, or I'd stop the vehicle too close, attempting to make the deer run....This inept behavior generally irritated the poachers, making them think we didn't know what we were doing. However, that was a good thing, since a poacher who thinks he is better at this poaching game than you are is less likely to suspect you of being an undercover officer.

Although the book is presented as a first person account, the author is Stewart's former co-worker and established wildlife writer W.H. "Chip" Gross. In his introduction, there is no mention of oral history, in those terms, and no clarifying statements as to how he gathered the information. In fact there is no claim that it is intended to be oral history, but rather memoir. Here is the excerpt that addresses methodology:

Since Stewart's story is a memoir recalled after the fact, detailing events many years in the past, its dialogue necessarily is not exact---being an approximate re-creation rather than an exact transcription of the conversations that occurred. Readers also should be aware that the names of most people discussed---fellow officers and bystanders as well as suspects---have been changed to preserve their privacy.

Gross does not say he interviewed/recorded Stewart when researching Stewart's career, nor is there any evidence of interplay between Gross and Stewart in the text of the book. The book contains dialogue, but feels sanitized, with pieces of recalled conversation quoted. People's names have been redacted. I was not confident, after reading the book, that it was Stewart's voice and not Gross's that came through on the pages. We have no way of knowing.

Should this be considered oral history? No. But perhaps as a first cousin to oral history, what truly is a memoir provides valuable observations when studying the nuances and distinctions between closely related genres. Sharon O'Brien (A Short Reflection on Teaching Memoir and Oral History. *Oral History Review* 25/1-2 (Summer/Fall 1998): 113-117) does well to compare and contrast the genres of oral history and memoir. In pointing to differences she states, "One text is written, the other oral; one demands an individual author, while in the other "authorship" exists in the interplay between interviewer and storyteller. And of similarities she says, "Both are forms of narrative in which ordinary

people claim the authority to tell their own stories; both are forms tinged by imagination as well as memory (since the oral history narrative, like memoir, is shaped by selection and omission...)”.

Reading the book, you can imagine how the undercover stories would be appreciated in the medium of oral history, and how the course of the telling might change as it intersects with an interviewer, creating dialogue and altered dynamic. It could have benefited from a more fluid narrative, but the subject of an undercover wildlife officer’s experiences over an eighteen-year period was both insightful and interesting.

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