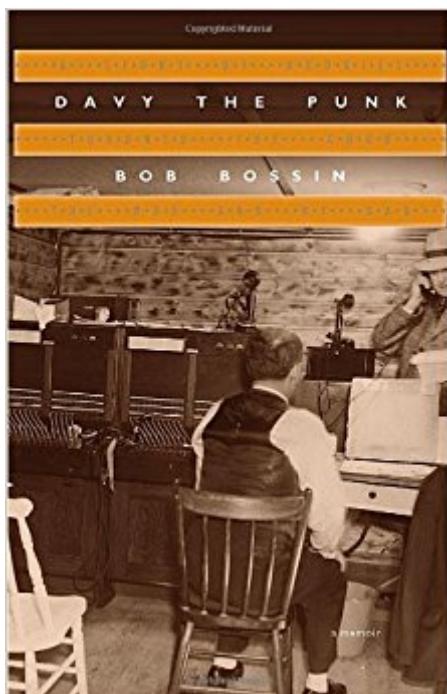


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# Davy The Punk: A Story Of Bookies, Toronto The Good, The Mob And My Dad



## Synopsis

Celebrated Canadian folk singer Bob Bossin tells the story of his father's life in the gambling underworld of the 1930s and 40s. By turns a touching memoir of father and son and an insightful social history, *Davy the Punk* is packed with street-wise stories and troubling revelations about Canada in the 20th century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'By parts history, anthropology, political science, biography and memoir, the book follows Bob's father, his family, the circles of his underworld and, later, show business associates, and a great deal more.... "The personal is political," as the feminist adage teaches us. Here, the political is personal. The events of Davy's time, roughly the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, rocked his life and career. Thanks to his son's research and insight, we can learn a lot about those politics and their legacy by reading his engaging story. It's this interweaving of political and personal that gives the book its strength and momentum. Each step on the narrative journey is supported with a wealth of background and analysis, always informative, always entertaining. Horse-racing stories and jokes are some of the best around, and the Bossins, father and son, tell them masterfully.' (Stephen Aberle Outlook Magazine) Deftly organized for maximum enjoyment and insight, this memoir brings to life important times in Jewish Canadian history. Bob Bossin's memoir about his father, *Davy the Punk*, is an enticing, engrossing, and enchanting read. Bossin's father died when he was ten, so Bossin needed to stretch the structure of his book and create much more than a memoir. It is Jewish genealogy (Bossin's family emigrated from the Ukraine in the late 1880s), it is Canadian

history (they settled in the slums of Toronto), and it is a commentary on both Canadian and American social problems (primarily gambling on horse races and bootlegging in the decades prior to World War II). Since Bossin has direct knowledge of his father for only ten years, he has had to verify many of stories he heard as a child. In the afterword, he details the painstaking research he attempted for years; this section by itself is a superb reminder to memoir writers that the best stories get the facts straight. Bossin's background as a journalist serves him admirably. His prose is lively, and the memoir has the intrigue of a novel. The title is a reference to his father's alleged association with gangsters. The author's style is folksy, and he often clutches a clichÃ© and squeezes out extra metaphorical meaning: "The streets of the Ward were not paved with gold, but they were paved." Sometimes he uses a common phrase in an uncommon context, giving it new life; Bossin scorns the Volstead Act and comments that it "offered the greatest affirmative action program for criminals ever devised." His proficiency in writing is evident when his father retells one of the more famous jokes about race horses, the saga of Lucky Seven. The vintage photographs bestow the feeling of nostalgia and are strategically placed throughout the memoir rather than incorporating them all in a separate section. This positioning serves to comment on and strengthen the narrative. Bossin characterizes Senator Estes Kefauver as less than stellar, for instance, and the accompanying photo portrays him as a dolt from Tennessee. Readers interested in Jewish culture in Canada, the inner workings of gambling on horses, or just a bittersweet yarn of a son admiring his father will relish Bossin's story. (Thomas H. Brennan Foreword Reviews)`Davy the Punk is a wonderful read on so many levels. Horse players will be thrilled at the old school tales of how races were bet and the shenanigans that took place to affect the outcomes. Historians will enjoy the walk through the first 50 years of the 20th century. And for those who are easily moved by father-son emotions, there's plenty of that as well, including, late in the book, a stunning revelation about Bob Bossin's own pedigree. `Bossin tells us that his father was a great story teller. Davy the Punk would be pleased to know he has successfully passed on at least one of his formidable skills.' (Down the Stretch Newspaper)

``I come from a family of storytellers," writes Bob Bossin, and he has clearly inherited the gift. A rich mix of stories about his father, his family, Jewish immigrant life, political high life and the criminal underworld. Entertaining, illuminating and, at times, touching. (Leon Rosselson, author of *Home is a Place Called Nowhere* and *Rosa's Singing Grandfather*)Davy the Punk spins his tales tall and true to the circl'e of Jewish hoods in 1940s Toronto, mesmerizing them and us. In this memoir of a childhood that is the stuff of dreams and movies, Bob Bossin pays loving tribute to a father whose

name alone conjures up a lost world. With a songwriter's ear, a performer's sense of timing and a poet's grace, he brings that world back to life. The apple (or, in this case, the apple strudel) doesn't fall far from the tree. ' (Si Kahn, author, musician and organizer)`I loved this. This generation [Bossin] writes about has now vanished, but the colourful, hard-talking comedic experience of life on the edge comes back. Bossin is a great storyteller, and these are great stories. I can hear the voice of that generation clearly. Wonderful!' (Clayton Ruby)`Damon Runyon meets Sholem Aleichem where the Orange Order calls all the shots. Davy the Punk is a touching and very funny portrait of a part of Jewish Toronto that too many people like to pretend wasn't there.' (Michael Wex, author of *Born to Kvetch*)`Davy the Punk is a thoroughly enjoyable and revealing romp through the historical underside of Toronto the Good. With verve and enthusiasm, Bob Bossin brings a performer's skill to the tall but true tales in what is, ultimately, his family's story. (Lilian Nattel, author of *Web of Angels* and *The River Midnight*)`Bob Bossin's father Davy lived in the seamy underside of Toronto the Good between the wars--a Runyonesque milieu of bookies and baseball, horses and payoffs, right in the zone where crime buys a drink for enterprise. Bossin's memoir of Davy is fascinating, funny, dark and poignant--a vividly readable portrait of an unforgettable man in a remarkable habitat.'

(Silver Donald Cameron, author of *The Education of Everett Richardson* and *The Living Beach*)`Amid the fascinating and sometimes belly-laugh-funny anecdotes of underworld life in mid-20th-century Toronto the Good, Davy The Punk depicts a son's poignant search for his infinitely resourceful, elusive and wounded father. Bob Bossin has penned a witty and generous memorial to a man, we sense, he is still seeking to know.' (Gabor MatÃfÃ© M.D., author of *In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts* and *Scattered Minds*)`Davy the Punk is a terrific read, both a loving biography of a "little guy" and a fascinating social history. A real page-turner.' (Cyril Levitt, author of *The Riot at Christie Pitts*)`A life so fascinating, hilarious and outrageous, it's worthy of a Mordecai Richler novel.'

(Andreas Schroeder, author of *Robbers* and *Renovating Heaven*)

This was a great read. I've always been intreagued by various elements of the underworld being from the Boston area, but this memoir is different. It is quite personal and touching in many ways, particularly as child growing up not really knowing what dad did all day. My own father was a cop and we got nothing from him except for the time he captured an escaped horse! That was news. But the realization that Davy was right there in the thick of dangerous game -- legally & physically -- was actually fun to read about. And when Bob speaks of his dad's exploits with uncertainty and a touch or incredulity it was all entertaining. Sometimes the fiction is more interesting. I loved too the personal family notes from immigration to settlement and survival ... it was all very real. Hearing

Davy's story unfold, I enjoyed his rebellious nature but feared that he would get caught up in a danger that would be more violent than things turned out (unless Bob has notes he isn't sharing!). But the brushes with the crime bosses & thugs, famous here in the states, only made it more real for me. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book and hope I get to see Bob's show some day! On a final note, without any comment, I thought the final "chapter" of the story about Bob's mom was fascinating.

Even if you're not familiar with Toronto, or gambling, or horse racing, I still think you'll love this book. Beautifully and entertainingly written, the book chronicles musician and writer Bob Bossin's journey as he uncovers his father's hardscrabble immigrant childhood and his shady past, including connections with well-known US crime figures. Along the way Bossin explores the anti-Semitism of the era, society's double standards, and the sly ingenuity of the gambling underworld, while coming to terms with a complex figure and unconventional father who died before his son got to ask him all the questions he wanted to. By turns humorous and moving, this is a winner of a book.

I read this book in one sitting while flying from Toronto to LA and enjoyed it immensely. As the sub-title says it is about "bookies, Toronto the good the Mob and Bossin's dad" but it's also about families, immigration, anti-Semitism, memory and story-telling. It will make you laugh and it will make you cry. What more can you ask from a book?

Bob Bossin has written a must read autobiography of growing up with a professional gambler as his father. He didn't know this while it was happening but the slow reveal of his background is fascinating. Set in 1950's Toronto The Good, it shares memories of a shadier side within an alleged goody goody city also growing up. Couldn't put it down.

A wonderfully written story of the Jewish gangsters of the 30's and 40's. If you are familiar with Toronto, Jewish life or horses, you will love this story. The author did some great research to pull this all together.

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