Praise for *Missing Persons*

“A spiritual journey”

“Bruce Piasecki has added his own twist to the endlessly repeatable tale of self-invention, tracking a spiritual journey through love and faith, family and friends. *Missing Persons* is a book about the absences that define our lives, the tears in the fabric that we spend a lifetime trying to repair.”

–Jay Parini
Author of *The Last Station*

“An inspiring read”

“What we first forget and then rescue from our memories make for the best memoirs. Bruce Piasecki, remembering in *Missing Persons*, inspires everyone to find what is missing in their own life. An inspiring read.”

–Rabbi Laurence Aryeh Alpern
Temple Shabbat Shalom
Saratoga Springs, NY

“Eloquent”

“In this eloquent memoir Bruce Piasecki . . . celebrates the family and friends who made possible his journey from an impoverished childhood to hard earned success.”

–Lucien Ross Tharaud
Contract Lawyer, Legal Editor
“A sense of wonder”

“Bruce Piasecki’s writing style possesses a sense of wonder that reaches a new level of imaginative discourse. Here, the magical realism and sensitivity to the people who have shaped his life bring a new understanding of this man, who has already done so much in the realms of business and life.”

–Thaddeus Rutkowski
Author of *Haywire*

“Poignant and profound”

“Bruce Piasecki’s memoir is a work of art—lyrical and luminous . . . a moving account of the people in his life who inspired him. From dirt poor to best-selling author, Bruce never stops thinking and feeling. It is a rare treat to reflect with him on his journey. Poignant and profound.”

–Sanford Schram
Professor of Political Science and Public Policy
Hunter College, CUNY
“A generosity of spirit”

“A delicious read! Missing Persons reveals the man behind business bestsellers like Doing More With Less. Piasecki’s evocative vignettes reflect a generosity of spirit and a genuine humility that will inspire you to reflect on your own influences.”

–William M. Throop
Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies
Green Mountain College

“Powerful”

“How do the street smarts learned at an early age show a born poet and scholar the way to wealth based on ‘doing more with less?’ In a constantly surprising series of vignettes based on love, labor, and loss, the protean Bruce Piasecki has written a fable for our times, one that reminds us of how powerful the art of ordering our memories can prove. Meet here a Ben Franklin for our times.”

–R. Laurence Moore
Author of Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans
MISSING PERSONS

A Life of Unexpected Influences

BRUCE PIASECKI
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Foreword
by Jay Parini

*Missing Persons* is an eye-opener both for its frankness and for how it fits yet distorts literary traditions.

I have endorsed Bruce Piasecki’s prior nonfiction books. They are works of nonfiction with plenty of narrative skill in their rendering. But *Missing Persons* explores new territories by diving straight into the realms of poetry, psychology, self-invention, prosperity, personal narrative and the fate of families. This is the stuff of autobiography writ large, as I learned from editing the *Norton Anthology of American Autobiography*.

Throughout, Piasecki takes us on an unexpected journey into a new form of autobiography, a life story projected and reflected. For *Missing Persons* proves itself to have deep roots in American and in the Latin American traditions of magical realism. Furthermore, the author overall creates an atmosphere of pragmatic self-awareness. This comes directly from the realms of modern business, but also indirectly from the wit and ambitions of Ben Franklin. It is this eclectic mix that proves electrifying.
Before you dive in, perhaps you’d find this useful to frame your expectations. For any judicious review of literature will suggest that autobiography lies at the dead center of the American enterprise—not a surprising fact, given that American history presupposes a radical sense of equality, one in which the individual is celebrated.

Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” is truly our national anthem, although the self that Whitman celebrates moves well beyond petty individualism: this is the song of the American self, the common man who becomes, through awareness, education, and hard work, a distinct part of a larger whole.

As a distinct genre, autobiography was pioneered by Ben Franklin, the father of the form in its American incarnation, which is always the story of how a boy from nowhere cobbled together a life, found his footing in the world, and transformed that world along with himself, making himself part and parcel of a peculiar universe, one of his own self-invention. The genre migrates through various narrative modes, such as the journey of Henry David Thoreau to the edge of the village, where he builds a house of self on the shores of Walden Pond and discovers the universe. It reaches through the immigrant narratives of figures such as Mary Antin, who in The Promised Land put forward a paradigm of assimilation that has inspired generations of arrivals to these shores. It snakes through the narratives of Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois, who framed the debate over race in America for all time, and moves through such great contemporary classics as Hemingway’s A Moveable Feast or Annie Dillard’s gorgeous Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. The genre seems endlessly protean, open to fresh voices and forms, expansive.

Bruce Piasecki has added his own twist to the endlessly repeatable tale of self-invention, tracking a spiritual journey through love and faith, family and friends. Missing Persons is a book about the absences that define our lives, the tears in the fabric that we spend a lifetime trying to repair. It’s about what the poet Elizabeth Bishop called “The Art of Losing,” and yet each
loss foretells a gain, as Piasecki reshapes his life, rediscovers lost
closest family and friends, and connects to literary ancestors—some of
whom, like Walt Whitman, lend a layer of texture and allusion to
his prose that makes it not only readable but re-readable.

As an ex-basketball player, Piasecki does not presume he can
jump as high as Ben Franklin or Whitman or Jonathan Edwards
or Casanova, just a few of the writers he channels. Instead, in an
unpretentious, tactical, and sure-footed way, he examines the
events that shaped his own life through the lens of these great
writers, inhabiting what he calls the “neighborhood” of their
lives. Their books are his neighbors and friends throughout this
memoir, and he echoes them at every turn.

*Missing Persons* includes over seventy interrelated vignettes—
tiny nuggets of narration that nest within the larger narrative arc
as the author describes his growing self-awareness, a slowly
widening sense of the world. The vignettes move in a roughly
chronological fashion, but some of them play back and repeat cer-
tain themes and motifs—as with key characterizations of the
author’s long dead father, Walter, his generous mother Lillian, his
lovely daughter Colette, and his strong wife Varlissima. These
characters dance in his head, and their voices underpin his own.
They appear and disappear, flash and fade.

Piasecki is a natural postmodernist, and he plays easily—one
might almost say fast and loose—with time, as in the final section,
where he writes the autobiography of his future. He builds on
understandings already attained, while shaping a larger under-
standing of his own selfhood in response to the world. Indeed,
this is a work of fiction in the truest sense. That is, it’s about cre-
ating narratives by highlighting some themes, hiding others. As
the author dances around the absences in his life, he uses lan-
guage itself—a supple instrument in his hands—to create new
holes, to fill spaces, to make a life of amleness and plenitude.

This is a fresh and highly readable contribution to the art of
autobiography. It has narrative thrills and the *frissons* of poetic
insights. By accretion and artful juxtaposition, the author builds a
Missing Persons

life. But *Missing Persons* is not just a reflection on the life of Bruce Piasecki, businessman and scholar, entrepreneur and family man.

Piasecki becomes, in effect, every man here, dramatizing the sorrows and joys that come into our lives, taking us through his experiences, allowing us to enter his world in ways that become our world, as readers.