

AFTERNOONS WITH HARVEY BEAM

CARRIE COX

ABOUT THE BOOK

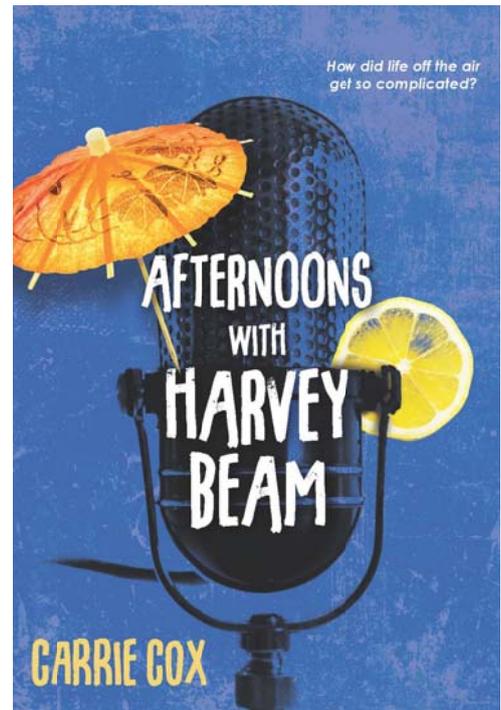
As a young man, Harvey Beam got the hell out of his hometown, confirming his suspicions that you can successfully run away from your problems. But, after forging a big-city career in talkback radio, Harvey is now experiencing a 'positional hiatus'. The words aren't coming out right, Harvey's mojo is fading and a celebrity host is eyeing his timeslot. Back in Shorton, Harvey's father Lionel appears at long last to be dying. It seems it's finally time for Harvey Beam to head home and face a different kind of music. In wading through a past that seems disturbingly unchanged, the last thing he expects is a chance encounter with a wonderful stranger.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carrie Cox is a journalist, author, tutor, mother and timid surfer, never all at once and not in that order. She grew up in Mackay, Queensland, and has also lived in Sydney, Brisbane and, since 2010, Perth. She has written and subedited for many publications, including *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Encore*, *Practical Parenting*, *Brisbane News*, *Woman's Day*, *TV Week* and *The Weekend West*. Carrie penned a weekly satirical column, 'Carrie On', that was syndicated to six newspapers over ten years until she ran out of things to say. She has also authored two non-fiction books, *Coal, Crisis, Challenge* and *You Take The High Road and I'll Take The Bus*. This is her first novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is the Beam family just an ordinary one?
2. *Anyway, his father is dying, and for some people — plenty of people, he imagines — that's a big deal.* (p.6) Why do you think Harvey is really heading home?
3. What impact does the expansion of the original Beam family unit (via additions such as Naomi's husband Matt, and Harvey's daughters) have on the dynamic of Harvey, his mother and his siblings?
4. How would you describe Lionel Beam's relationships with Bryan and Harvey? Why do you think those relationships are so different?
5. What impact does Suze still have on Harvey's life?
6. Why does Harvey Beam find late afternoons so difficult?
7. A difficult childhood can make you a better parent or a worse parent. What impact has it had on Harvey?
8. Is this the conversation I was meant to come back here for? (p.77) What is it about this conversation with Matt that feels so important to Harvey?
9. In chapter 27, Harvey goes to hospital to *have the conversation with his father* (p.145). Why does he end up *saying nothing at all* (p.151)? Would you have preferred that he said something?
10. What epiphanies does Harvey have when he returns to Shorton?
11. In what ways does this trip change him?
12. Do you think it is necessary to 'go back' before you can move on?



13. What is it about talkback radio that has drawn Harvey to it?
14. Is there a difference between 'on air' and 'off air' Harvey?
15. Do you feel optimistic about the future of Harvey and Grace?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Where did the character of Harvey Beam come from? It feels as if you know him rather well!

I deliberately created a character that I thought was a few steps removed from me, most notably male and with a (slightly) different job. I very deliberately wanted to steer away from autobiography while still hitting upon themes that I personally know very well. But it's funny ... Harvey felt like a well-worn jacket very quickly. I *knew* him. I knew how he would react to certain situations and what he might say. It surprised me how quickly Harvey inhabited me, or I inhabited him, and the joy of that discovery propelled the writing process. I do think that I possibly understand men more than I understand women (some of my best friends are male) and perhaps that too made this an easier fit than if the key protagonist had been a woman. In short, I initially hid behind Harvey Beam, but very quickly I came to stand beside him quite comfortably.

Is the regional town of Shorton based on anywhere in particular?

The easy answer is that Shorton is every small town, every regional centre, every launching pad or endgame. But I guess the honest answer is that I had my own hometown of Mackay in mind during the writing process. It was a wonderful place to grow up, but I have a somehow fractious relationship with it these days and that makes me sad. I'd like to fix that somehow.

How did you go about balancing the darkness and the light in this novel?

Honestly, that's the key – the most important thing for me in this process was to try to balance those two things; to draw a line through it all that leads to a sense of hope and also maybe acceptance. Like many people who decide to tear strips off themselves by writing a novel, I'm an introspective person and also outwardly observational. I think the answers to everything lie in peeling back the pain, yet I also *hate* peeling back the pain. Hate it. It hurts. I gravitate to sad movies but loathe crying from start to finish. So I think my answer is to temper pain with levity. That's how I live, what I search for and how I write.

Is there something about the relationship between men (their friendships and family relationships) that particularly interests you?

I am *fascinated* by male relationships, both with each other and with women. At great risk of generalising, men are outwardly simpler in their approach, less analytical, less demanding, less everything ... but still waters run deep. There's a lot going on beneath the meniscus and it's probably through a couple of really special male friendships I've had that I've been able to glimpse those things and then, as a journalist who can't help herself, tease those things out. Running with male friends used to particularly accelerate those insights – you get to know a *lot* about people when you pound the pavement with them for hours at a time. Many epiphanies are borne of exhaustion! I am fascinated by the male psyche and I love exploring it.

What's next for Carrie Cox?

I'd like to write another novel, possibly an addendum to Harvey, possibly not. I really enjoyed the whole process, even the really tedious passages, the mental blocks, the self-doubt, all of it. I think I'm a better person for it – hopefully a better mother and a better wife – and even accounting for all the time involved ... four good years ... it was cheaper than therapy.



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