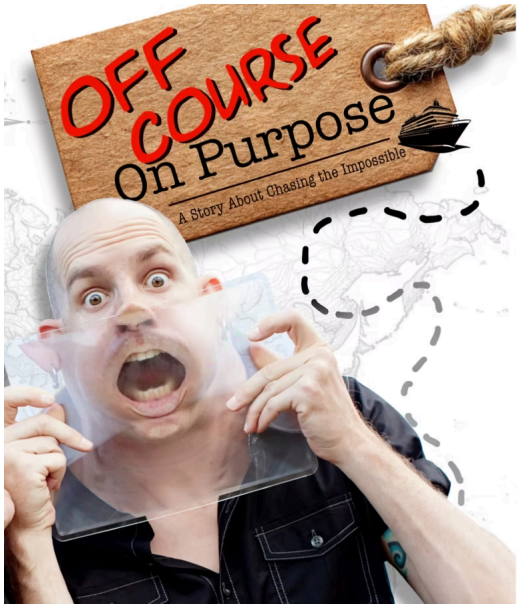
BOOK REVIEW: OFF COURSE ON PURPOSE

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Reviewed by Eric Shibuya



"If I fail, let it be because I wasn't good enough, not because I didn't sacrifice enough."
–Bill Berry

Bill Berry's story will resonate with many a performer chasing the dream. Indeed, it will touch many who are trying to make their way in this world via the paths not taken. Out of school at 18 (sans diploma), and essentially homeless, Berry seeks not simply to survive, but thrive in a world that is not structured for the unorthodox. Berry's journey takes him from chasing any job that pays, through learning to juggle and perform, to building Team Rootberry with Jonathan Root, all the way through their triumphs at the 2003 IJA Championships.

The overall tone of the book is light and hopeful, even during moments of uncertainty. Undoubtedly the most serious chapter is when Berry describes his reaction to the September 11 attacks and the eeriness of performing at an empty Legoland. Other anecdotes are much lighter, from Rootberry's first "performances" at the Edinburgh Fringe and even the time they are stopped in a rental car that the police think is stolen (as Berry tries to explain the various "weapons" in the car). Several well-known jugglers make an appearance in the book, to include Sean McKinney, Robert "Butterfly Man" Nelson, Matt Hall, Ivan Pecel, and Jon Wee and Owen Morse of the Passing Zone.

As a general criticism, the book does suffer from what is a chronic problem of most self-published works. It could probably use some editing to tighten the narrative, as it is quite long. This length leads to some repetitive sections. Despite this length, there are ironically some parts that seem almost "too short," such as Berry's breakup with his first serious girlfriend and his alcohol use to dull that heartache (which simply ends with "for the next few months, alcohol iced the ache"). Berry can write about serious events and emotions, as readers of his previous book, *Stories That Move*, can attest. That is not the overall tone he is going for here. There are also a couple of chapters that include somewhat explicit descriptions of sexual activity that do not, honestly, move the narrative forward. (Content warnings are given at the beginning of each chapter where these events are described).

The above criticisms are in the main abstract ones. For anyone coming to the book looking for a "self-help, story of overcoming odds" type book, the redundancy and length could be off-putting, despite Berry's easygoing style overall. For fellow jugglers, even one who does not know Bill personally but who moves in the same circles, much of the returning issues of self-doubt and setbacks read as familiar occurrences, as do the moments of help and encouragement from the juggling community, and the successes along the way.

In the end, the book does two great things. Berry tells his own story of success despite adversity, of constantly moving forward and never giving up. Secondly, Berry tells the story of the great community of jugglers, from his "Secret Investor" to simply the help (physical, monetary, and psychological) from fellow jugglers. *Off Course on Purpose* tells Berry's own journey, but also provides many signposts of what it means to "render assistance to fellow jugglers." That is perhaps no better expressed than by Owen Morse after he and Jon Wee take Rootberry to dinner after a Passing Zone show: "Tonight, nine other corporate events are happening in this city, and all of them hired entertainment. You guys could have been working any one of those while we worked this one. So don't buy into this idea that it's a competition; there's plenty of work for all of us."

The book ends at the 2003 IJA Championships, but Berry's (and Team Rootberry's) story does not end there. I look forward to the next volume of their ongoing journey.

The book is available in hardcopy ($34.99), ebook, and audiobook formats (read by Brad Grochowski). There are annotations, QR codes/video links, and photos) in the hardcopy and ebook versions. It can be found at mr.billberry.com as well as your usual online bookstores.

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