

PRESS KIT

CHARLIE FIG AND THE LIP
Steven Charnow

Published by Unsolicited Press

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Contact: SR Stewart
[Company Name]
Phone (503)864-6533
unsolicitedpress@gmail.com

[Company Name]

Press Release

[Headline]

Available on December 28, 2014

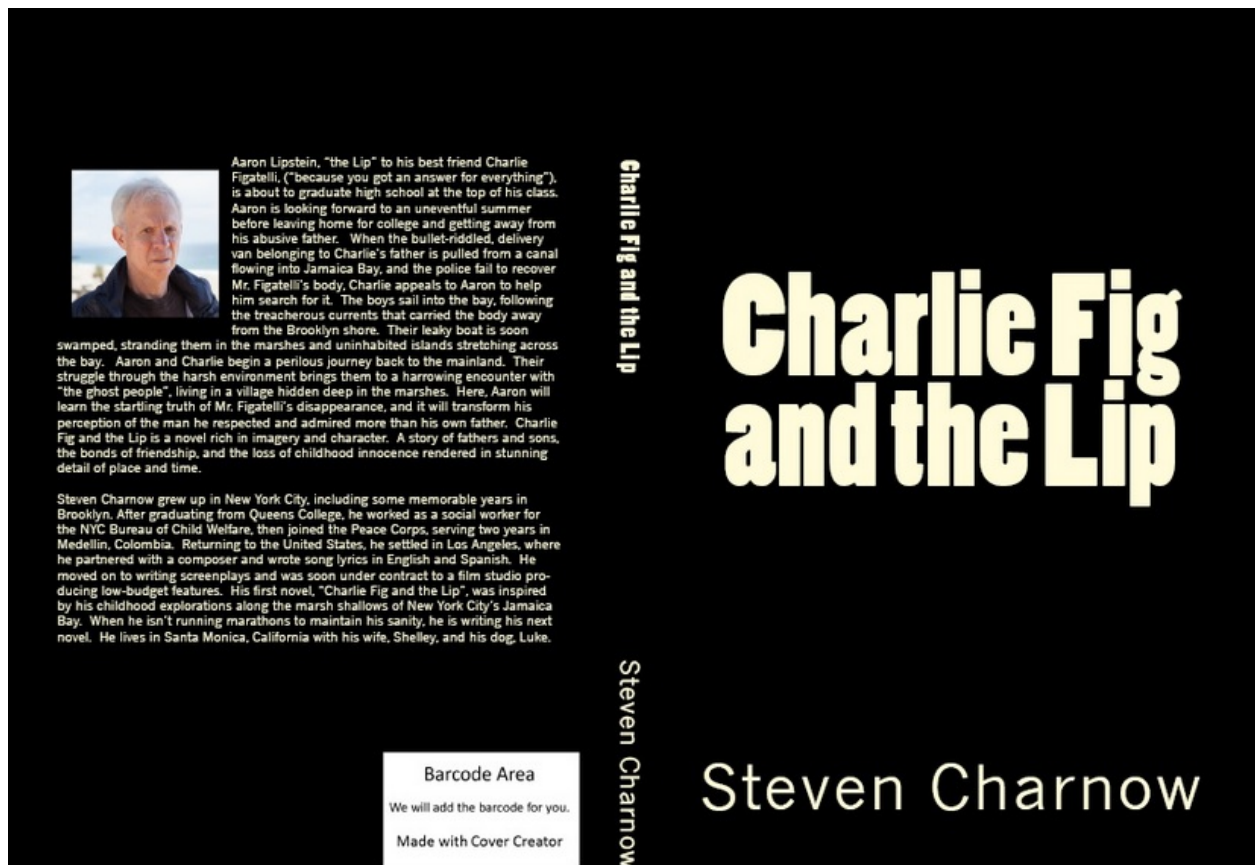
San Francisco, CA December 28, 2014: Unsolicited Press, a small press based out of California releases Steven Charnow's *Charlie Fig and the Lip*, a coming-of-age novel following the turbulent events between Aaron Lipstein and Charlie Figatelli. It is the first novel from Charnow.

Aaron Lipstein, "the Lip" to his best friend Charlie Figatelli, ("because you got an answer for everything"), is about to graduate high school at the top of his class. Aaron is looking forward to an uneventful summer before leaving home for college and getting away from his abusive father. When the bullet-riddled, delivery van belonging to Charlie's father is pulled from a canal flowing into Jamaica Bay, and the police fail to recover Mr. Figatelli's body, Charlie appeals to Aaron to help him search for it.

Steven Charnow grew up in New York City, including some memorable years in Brooklyn. After graduating from Queens College, he worked as a social worker for the NYC Bureau of Child Welfare, and then joined the Peace Corps, serving two years in Medellin, Colombia. Returning to the United States, he settled in Los Angeles, where he collaborated with a composer and wrote song lyrics in English and Spanish. He moved on to writing screenplays and was soon under contract to a film studio producing low-budget features. His first novel, "Charlie Fig and the Lip," was inspired by his childhood explorations along the marsh shallows of New York City's Jamaica Bay. When he isn't running marathons to maintain his sanity, he is writing his next novel. He lives in Santa Monica, California with his wife, Shelley, and his dog, Luke.

Purchase the book at Unsolicited Press's website, or all major retailers. More information about Charnow can be found on his website: <http://www.stevencharnow.com/>

BOOK COVER



Published by UNSOLICITED PRESS

Unsolicited Press is a fast growing, independent publisher committed to discovering the work of poets and writers of quality fiction. They are on track to publish two manuscripts per month throughout 2015.

CONTACT

Steven Charnow

www.stevencharnow.com

310-450-2646

Rubie Grayson

Unsolicited Press

unsolicitedpress@gmail.com

BIO

Steven Charnow was born in Los Angeles, but grew up in New York City, including some memorable years in Brooklyn. He entered New York City's Queens College, where he majored in biology. By the end of his sophomore year, he knew he was hiking down the wrong career path, so he changed his major to English Literature. Graduating, he was hired as a case worker for the NYC Bureau of Child Welfare. Three years on the job and he took a leave of absence to join the Peace Corps. He served two years in Medellin, Colombia, working in the primary schools training teachers in the use of educational television in their classrooms. Returning to the United States, he worked his way through reverse culture shock and settled in Los Angeles. Finding his balance, he partnered with a composer and wrote song lyrics in English and Spanish. He co-wrote a musical and a one-act play, both staged in Los Angeles. He moved on to screenplays and was soon under contract to a film studio that produced low-budget features. His first novel, "Charlie Fig and the Lip", was inspired by his childhood explorations along the marsh shallows of New York City's Jamaica Bay. When he isn't running marathons to maintain his sanity, he is writing his next novel. He lives in Santa Monica, California with his wife, Shelley, and a dog, Luke.

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Aaron Lipstein, “the Lip” to his best friend Charlie Figatelli, (“because you got an answer for everything”), is about to graduate high school at the top of his class. Aaron is looking forward to an uneventful summer before leaving home for college and getting away from his abusive father. When the bullet-riddled, delivery van belonging to Charlie’s father is pulled from a canal flowing into Jamaica Bay, and the police fail to recover Mr. Figatelli’s body, Charlie appeals to Aaron to help him search for it. The boys sail into the bay, following the treacherous currents that carried the body away from the Brooklyn shore. Their leaky boat is soon swamped, stranding them in the marshes and uninhabited islands stretching across the bay. Aaron and Charlie begin a perilous journey back to the mainland. Their struggle through the harsh environment brings them to a harrowing encounter with “the ghost people”, living in a village hidden deep in the marshes. Here, Aaron will learn the startling truth of Mr. Figatelli’s disappearance, and it will transform his perception of the man he respected and admired more than his own father. Charlie Fig and the Lip is a novel rich in imagery and character. A story of fathers and sons, the bonds of friendship, and the loss of childhood innocence rendered in stunning detail of place and time.

REVIEWS

KIRKUS REVIEW

TITLE INFORMATION

CHARLIE FIG AND THE LIP

Charnow, Steven

Unsolicited Press (208 pp.)

\$20.00 paperback

ISBN: 978-0692326626; November 21, 2014

BOOK REVIEW

Teenage friends in 1950s Brooklyn dodge cops and mobsters in this YA thriller.

In June 1959, Aaron Lipstein—known as “the Lip”—is the class valedictorian of the elite Bronx High School of Science in New York City, and he plans to enter Columbia University in the fall. His friend Charlie Figatelli is a petty thief who spends his time on the streets of Brooklyn. Aaron has a strained relationship with his dad, a taxi driver who earned a Silver Star in World War II. Charlie’s father, meanwhile, runs a bakery that’s actually a front for gambling and moneylending. Things get complicated when Charlie persuades Aaron to help him steal hubcaps; Charlie steals a car, leaving Aaron literally holding the bag, or bags, filled with stolen goods, until the local bully, Vito, expropriates them. The car is eventually found, and the cops interview Aaron, who says that Vito stole it. Then Mr. Figatelli’s truck is found in Jamaica Bay full of bullet holes, and everyone thinks he’s dead. Charlie insists on searching the marshes of the bay for his dad’s body, so that his father can have a real funeral, and not just a simple memorial service. Further complications arise when a mobster follows them, in order to make sure that Mr. Figatelli is really dead. The marshes prove to be another world, complete with a derelict amusement park, a deranged World War II veteran, and an isolated village of Dutch-speaking fishermen. Debut author Charnow has written an engaging period tale about fathers and sons. Written from Aaron’s point of view, it captures much of the stress and anxiety of being a teenager, along with Aaron’s up-and-down feelings about what his father has made of his life, and what he will make of his own. There are minor issues, however: The author’s admitted “liberties” with historical events are ill-advised; Aaron’s inner monologues sometimes seem overly formal for a self-conscious teen; and some of the violence near the end of the book (“Blood spewed from Stellini’s mouth, spraying out like paint flicked from a brush”) seems excessive.

An often compelling story that immerses its readers in a very different time.

INTERVIEW

Canarsie Courier

2015-02-05

Former Canarsie Resident Revisits Roots in New Book

By Tess McRae



Growing up, it can be hard to imagine something as trivial as abandoned beach houses becoming the inspiration for a book. But even 3,000 miles away in sunny California, Stephen Charnow, who grew up in Canarsie, couldn't shake the image of a dozen wooden shacks on stilts along the Jamaica Bay shoreline.

"No one knew who built them or lived there, so as kids we had all kinds of stories and urban myths," said Charnow, whose new book, *"Charlie Fig and the Lip,"* centers around two Canarsie boys who explore the marshy area of the bay. "Even to this day, I never learned who built those homes, but the image stayed with me. That was the first thing that came to me when I sat down to write the book."

Though readers and reviewers describe it as a "young adult thriller," Charnow describes *"Charlie Fig and the Lip"* as a coming-of-age story wrapped in a mystery.

The book tells the story of Charlie Figatelli and his friend Aaron "The Lip" Lipstein, who sail into Jamaica Bay in the late-1950s to find out what became of Figatelli's father — whose bullet-ridden delivery van was pulled from a canal.

Though the story embellishes on parts of Canarsie — Charnow gave the beach houses a spooky back story involving ghosts — the author stayed true to the feel of the neighborhood at that time.

"It had such a small town atmosphere," he told the *Canarsie Courier*. "I remember being able to leave P.S. 115, where I went to school, for lunch and eating at a luncheonette where I would get a vanilla malt. I have wonderful memories of riding my bike down to Floyd Bennett Field and seeing vegetable gardens in all the front yards."

While many writers might otherwise put a lot of themselves in a first-person narrative, 72-year-old Charnow said *The Lip* is almost entirely fictionalized.

“He’s made up of myself, other people and then I just expanded outward,” he said. “It’s not autobiographical. In the book, Aaron goes to the Bronx High School of Science. I probably wouldn’t have even passed the test.”

Charlie Fig, however, is based on someone Charnow remembers.

“He was a bit of a juvenile delinquent,” the author said. “I think the worst he did was steal a car. I wasn’t friends with him, but I noticed him. With the character of Charlie, there were certain requirements. The character had to be a certain way in how he thought and behaved. I didn’t know anyone else like that, who acted and saw life in the same way.”

Even though Charnow only stayed in Canarsie until he was 14 years old — he later moved to Bayside, Queens — the area always had a special place in the writer’s heart. He attended Samuel Tilden High School in East Flatbush until transferred to Martin Van Buren High School in Queens in his sophomore year.

“This was before Canarsie High School even existed,” he laughed.

“*Charlie Fig and The Lip*,” was published in December and is available in paperback on Amazon.

“I’d really like to know how Canarsie residents see this book,” Charnow said. “There was one woman who lives in L.A. but originally lived in Canarsie and after she read the book she said, ‘You just nailed it, how it felt living there,’ but I’m trying to get some of the independent bookstores in Brooklyn to stock it so I could maybe do a reading. I’d love to get some feedback.”

For now, Charnow said, he is relying on word of mouth and articles like this one to expose Canarsie residents to the existence of the book.

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THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES ARE EXCERPTED FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN CHARNOW AT A READING OF *CHARLIE FIG AND THE LIP* BEFORE MEMBERS OF IWOSC (INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA) ON NOVEMBER 13, 2014. THE EXCERPTS HIGHLIGHT THE PARTICULARS AND HISTORY OF THE SETTING – CANARSIE, BROOKLYN - AND ERA – LATE 1950'S - OF THE BOOK.

Q: How did you come to set your story in Brooklyn, specifically the Canarsie area?

A: I lived in Canarsie for a few years when I was a young boy. Canarsie is on Jamaica Bay. I'd seen a group of shacks on stilts in the marshes of the bay. About a dozen of them visible from the Belt Parkway, a highway circling Brooklyn and running along the bay. The shacks were long abandoned, and no one knew who built them, or had lived there. Various stories about the shacks circulated through Canarsie. Kids saying it was a village inhabited by cannibals, a crazed family like the one in *The Texas Chain Saw Murders*. Parents telling their misbehaving kids that's where the boogeymen lived. Like the story of L'uomo negro described in the book by Aaron's mother, who grew up in a fishing village in Italy. The image of those shacks stayed with me and the characters and story grew out from that memory.

Q: L'uomo negro?

A boogeyman in Italy wearing a black cape, a wide-brimmed hat pulled low over his face. He would emerge at night from the sea with a sack of nightmares coming for children who wouldn't listen to their parents.

Q: In your novel it is 1959, the year after the Dodgers have moved to LA. In fact, near the beginning of the book, the owner of an Eldorado is in his living room listening to Vin Scully, a young Scully at the start of his career, on the radio announcing a game - Wally Moon hitting a Moon Shot into the left field seats - while Aaron and Charlie are stealing the car. Okay, Walter O'Malley moves the Dodgers to L.A. What was the reaction?

A: At the time Walter O'Malley became the most hated man in Brooklyn, if not all of New York City. The man responsible for Brooklyn losing their beloved Bums. A joke often repeated said it all. A Dodger fan is asked if he had a gun with only two bullets in it and were facing Hitler, Stalin and O'Malley, who he would shoot. The fan hardly pauses before answering, Walter O'Malley...twice.

Q: The Dodgers first play at the LA Coliseum. When Dodger Stadium opens in Chavez Ravine, the Dodger Dog is introduced. Was there any precedent for it at Ebbets Field?

A: Peanuts, popcorn, cotton candy, Crackerjacks, and of course, hot dogs were sold in Ebbets Field. The hot dogs were never branded. That first happened in LA. By the way, during WWII,

meatless Tuesdays was put in effect. Part of the wartime rationing. The way the story goes a fan at the game on a Tuesday at Ebbets Field buys a hot dog from a vendor. A woman, another fan at the game, yells at him that it's unpatriotic to eat meat on Tuesday. The man yells back, don't worry lady, there ain't no meat in these hot dogs. If there was any food I'd associate with Ebbets Field it would be cheesecake. After a game, fans would leave Ebbets Field and go to nearby Junior's Deli on Flatbush Ave. for its cheesecake considered the best in NY.

Q: Aaron Lipstein, nicknamed the Lip, is about to graduate from the Bronx HS of Science, an elite NYC public school. Is that the high school you attended?

A: (laughs) No. Admission to Bronx Science is based on an exam open to all eighth and ninth grade New York City students. Of the thirty thousand who take the exam about twenty thousand check off Bronx Science as their first choice. Brooklyn Tech and Stuyvesant High are the other two choices. The exam covers math and verbal skills. Of the twenty thousand, or so who want to be admitted to Bronx Science, just over one thousand are accepted. About 5%. I never even thought of taking the exam, not even just to see how I would do. By the way, Bronx Science has produced eight Nobel Laureates. More than any other high school in the U.S.

Q: In the book, Canarsie, a section of Brooklyn, comes across as a small town, seemingly apart from the rest of the borough. Canarsie, a place at the end of the line.

A: It was very much like an isolated, small town. Avenue L, Canarsie's Main Street, USA. The butcher shop, fruit and vegetable store, movie theater, fish market, hardware store, a candy store/soda fountain. Now, there's Canarsie High School, but back then, in the year the book is set in, you had to travel, take two busses to attend high school, Tilden High in East Flatbush.

In some films of the thirties and forties, cop drama films, Canarsie's remoteness would often be joked about as in this line of dialogue: A police sergeant upset with a patrolman's performance warns him, "Screw up again like that, O'Hara, and you'll be pounding a beat at midnight in Canarsie." "Canarsie" was used as the punchline in more than one Three Stooges movie. Borscht Belt comedians performing at a Catskills hotel would work "Canarsie" into their acts. Just saying "Canarsie" would elicit at least a chuckle, if not a laugh from the audience.

The L train from Manhattan across Brooklyn descended from an overhead EL and ran on a right-of-way into Canarsie with a grade crossing just past the 105th Street Station. The last remaining crossing in NYC. The 105th Street Station and then the end of the line, Rockaway Parkway, a wooden platform that could've been taken for a whistle stop on an interstate railroad somewhere in Iowa.

Q: In your book, Aaron and Charlie are marooned on the islands in Jamaica Bay, where they stumble upon an abandoned amusement park. Did such a park really exist?

A: Not on an island in the bay. There was an amusement park in Canarsie, built near the beginning of the 20th Century on the shoreline of the bay. There were hotels and even a casino. An attempt to rival Coney Island as a destination for New Yorkers to come to the shore. The amusement park closed down, I think during the Depression. A few years later, it burned down. The Canarsie Pier was built on the site where the park had been. In my book, I moved the amusement park out into the bay and created a lot more islands than are actually out there.

Q: The trolley line too? The abandoned line in your book that ran from Canarsie to the amusement park on an island in the bay?

A: That trolley line never existed. But there was a line built about the time of the Civil War that carried passengers through Brooklyn into Canarsie, where they boarded a steamboat that sailed across the bay to the Rockaways.

Q: The descendants of the Dutch who established a settlement in lower Manhattan appear in your book, living in a village hidden deep in the marshes of the bay. They are descendants of the original settlers who supposedly purchased Manhattan for a handful of trinkets worth twenty-four dollars.

A: The story of the purchase, accurate or not, is generally believed to be a true account of one of the greatest real estate rip offs in American History. Europeans exploiting Native Americans. The Dutch buying Manhattan for \$24 of beads. It was a rip off, but not of the indigenous people living there. The Canarsee Indians, the tribe that sold Manhattan to the Dutch didn't own it. They lived in what is now present day Canarsie. Somehow they were in Manhattan, maybe hunting, or on a foray against a tribe that lived there and did own it. So after the Dutch bought it they were attacked by the tribe that did own it. The survivors fled across the East River and built a settlement they named Breuckelen after a town in the Netherlands. When the British invaded the name was changed to Brooklyn.

Q: Aaron takes the L train, the Canarsie Line, home from school. He's in the crowded car gazing at the ads above the windows but particularly at the poster of the current month's Miss Subways.

A: The Miss Subways posters were there to attract the rider's attention to the ads for gum, funeral homes, cigarettes, and stenographer's school. And in Aaron's case, it certainly accomplished that.

Q: Aaron was staring at Miss Subways, wondering about the size of her breasts.

A: Aaron is 16 years old. Hormones raging. The posters were never intended to be provocative. A studio portrait, usually a head shot, or from the waist up. A list of Miss Subway's hobbies, education, career goals. Young women, or a family member, or their boss would submit a photo and a brief bio. The poster first appeared sometime in the early 1940's.

Q: In your book, the Miss Subways Aaron stares at is studying for a B.A. at Hunter College, but would prefer an M.R.S.

A: That wasn't meant to be a joke, or, at the time, seen as sexist. Women, it was generally believed, went to college to get a husband, then raise a family. Some of the women crowned Miss Subways aspired to a modeling career, or success as a singer, or dancer, but no one, as far as I know, succeeded in turning their time as Miss Subways into a major career.

Q: Is Miss Subways still there?

A: No. A more enlightened view of male-female relationships brought the Miss Subways campaign to an end in 1976.

AUTHOR PHOTO

