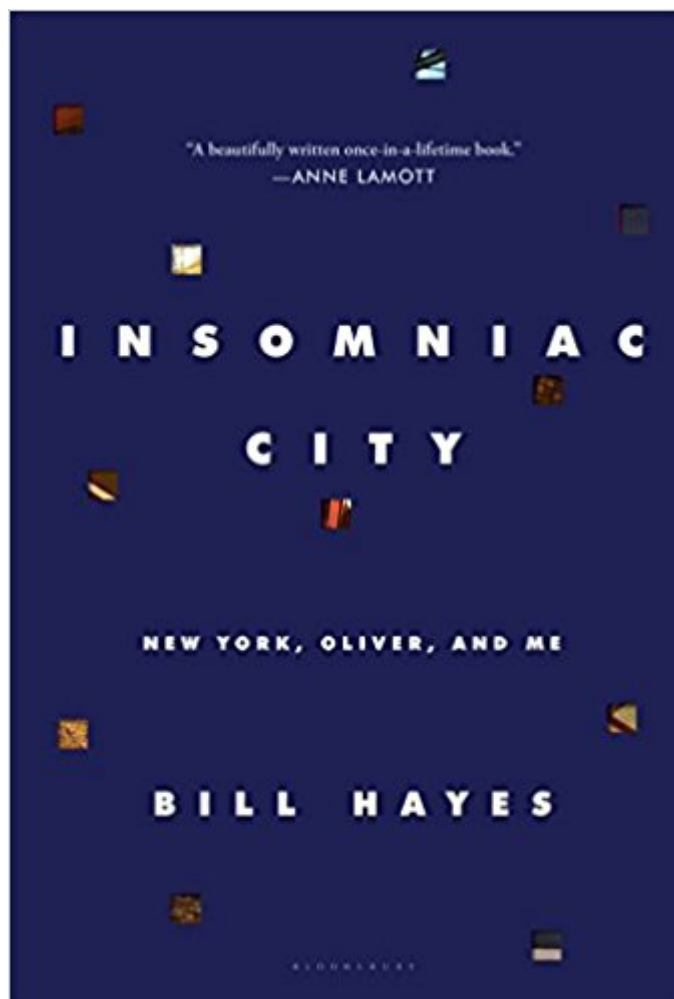


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# Insomniac City: New York, Oliver, And Me



## Synopsis

A moving celebration of what Bill Hayes calls "the evanescent, the eavesdropped, the unexpected" of life in New York City, and an intimate glimpse of his relationship with the late Oliver Sacks. "A beautifully written once-in-a-lifetime book, about love, about life, soul, and the wonderful loving genius Oliver Sacks, and New York, and laughter and all of creation."--Anne Lamott Bill Hayes came to New York City in 2009 with a one-way ticket and only the vaguest idea of how he would get by. But, at forty-eight years old, having spent decades in San Francisco, he craved change. Grieving over the death of his partner, he quickly discovered the profound consolations of the city's incessant rhythms, the sight of the Empire State Building against the night sky, and New Yorkers themselves, kindred souls that Hayes, a lifelong insomniac, encountered on late-night strolls with his camera. And he unexpectedly fell in love again, with his friend and neighbor, the writer and neurologist Oliver Sacks, whose exuberance--"I don't so much fear death as I do wasting life," he tells Hayes early on--is captured in funny and touching vignettes throughout. What emerges is a portrait of Sacks at his most personal and endearing, from falling in love for the first time at age seventy-five to facing illness and death (Sacks died of cancer in August 2015). *Insomniac City* is both a meditation on grief and a celebration of life. Filled with Hayes's distinctive street photos of everyday New Yorkers, the book is a love song to the city and to all who have felt the particular magic and solace it offers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of February 2017: The late, great Oliver Sacks was so famously private, he didn't divulge that he was gay until his memoir, *On the Move*, was published, shortly before his death at

the age of 82. Granted, this revelation was one of the least interesting things about him. Sacks was widely beloved, which is saying something for a scarily brilliant, yet somewhat reclusive neurologist. But his childlike wonder and ability to wrap our brains around the complexities of everything from music to migraines to the cancer he succumbed to, was infectious, and the graciousness--and extraordinary gratitude--with which he accepted his terminal diagnosis earned him even further admiration. It stands to reason, then, that Sacks's life partner must be pretty remarkable as well, and *Insomniac City* provides ample proof. In this affectionate and magnanimous memoir, author and photographer Bill Hayes pays tribute to their relationship, and provides a paean to one of the other loves of his life: New York City. Hayes's contagious regard for the Big Apple makes you almost believe that getting lost on the subway is a happy accident (almost!), and his Humans of New York-esque vignettes inspire the same esteem and faith in humanity as Brandon Stanton's blog of the same name. Add to that a couple of delightfully unlikely cameos from Björk and a black-eyed Lauren Hutton, and you won't want to sleep until the last page of *Insomniac City* is turned. Somewhere, Oliver Sacks is smiling. --Erin Kodicek, *The Book Review*

"[A] loving tribute to Sacks and to New York . . . Read just 50 pages, and you'll see easily enough how Hayes is Sacks's logical complement. Though possessed of different temperaments, both are alive to difference, variety, the possibilities of our rangy humanity; both are avid chroniclers of our species . . . Frank, beautiful, bewitching--[Hayes's photographs] unmask their subjects' best and truest selves." - Jennifer Senior, *New York Times*"Remarkably poignant. Readers will find themselves wishing the two men had more time, but as Hayes makes clear, they wasted none of the time they had." - *Publishers Weekly*"[*Insomniac City*] seems written in heightened states of feeling that infuse every detail with meaning and transient beauty." - *Shelf Awareness*"A unique and exuberant celebration of life and love." - *Kirkus Reviews*"Like Patti Smith's haunting *M Train*, Hayes' book weaves seemingly disparate threads of memory into a kind of sanctuary -- a secret place where one can shake off the treasured relics of past lives and prepare to be reborn anew." - *San Francisco Chronicle*"Hayes captures both the frenetic, exhilarating pace of New York City as well as the whimsy, fun and romance of the years he spent with Sacks." - *New York Post*"*Insomniac City* is resoundingly about life--about being wide awake to possibility, to the beauty of every fleeting moment." - *Oprah.com*"Hayes beautifully depicts the life and night light in a city which never sleeps. As you read this beautifully written book, you feel as if you are walking through the streets of New York and living this insomniac city's night life. This is an extremely enjoyable read for those who never stop fancying New York." - *Washington Independent Review of*

Books"Buy a box of tissues and pray for snow: This is the perfect weekend February read, and will have you alternately bawling and giddily clapping your hands for the lovers that may not have had the time they deserved, but certainly made the best with the time that they had." - Newsweek, "The Best New Book Releases""As eloquent in its silences and visuals as it is in its telling of the secrets of the heart. . . . The brilliance of *Insomniac City* is that almost Tolstoy-an directness and concretion of observation, both down-to-earth and downright visionary." - Bay Area Reporter"Poetic and profound . . . What emerges from this dual love letter is a lyrical reminder that happiness and heartache are inseparably entwined. . . . *Insomniac City* is an ineffably splendid read in its entirety, a mighty packet of pure aliveness." - Brainpickings"That life permeates every page of *Insomniac City*, a dual love story of a powerful relationship that will shortly end but, also, of a city that is constantly reinventing itself." - Counterpunch"Breathtaking . . . It's the kind of book that makes you stay up late without regret . . . Hayes' precise and affectionate observations of his newly adopted city, its denizens, subways, bodegas, and landmarks allow the reader to experience it through fresh eyes." - Palette Magazine"*Insomniac City* is a beautiful memoir in which Oliver Sacks comes wonderfully to life--a double portrait that also provides a vivid picture of New York City's neighborhoods and people. The ending is exquisitely wrought, heartrending and joyous." - Joyce Carol Oates"Like New York, the city he celebrates so poignantly in this book, Bill Hayes mixes 'memory with desire' to create a heartbreakingly gorgeous story of love, loss, and renewal." - Azar Nafisi, author of *READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN*"Hayes turns out to be that particular kind of big-city denizen, the irrepressible soul who treats the pavement like a cocktail party." - Peter Lewis, Barnes & Noble"*Insomniac City* is a love story to New York and the people we cherish, for Bill Hayes, the late Oliver Sacks. With prescience and tenderness, written with a sharp eye and a camera attuned to life on the streets, Hayes has composed a gorgeous memoir on why place matters to the soul of our humanity. I loved every single sentence in this quiet night-book, erotic and evocative, at once." - Terry Tempest Williams, author of *THE HOUR OF LAND*"A lyrical love letter to his partner of six years, Dr Oliver Sacks, and to New York City itself. Through a series of tender vignettes, we meet the characters from the streets of Manhattan, and we are brought into the cocoon of Oliver Sacks' apartment" - Irish Times"No lack of tenderness in *Insomniac City*, Bill Hayes's memoir of his life in New York with the writer and neurologist Oliver Sacks" - Guardian"A love letter to Sacks, but also to New York... Overheard remarks, curious reflections by Sacks, poetic observations keep the narrative moving" - Edmund White, Guardian

Last year I enjoyed reading Oliver Sacks' memoir, *On The Move*, published very near his death. In

that excellent volume, Sacks described the process of finally coming out as a gay man and embarking upon his first relationship in thirty-five years. This particular relationship, with the writer/photographer Bill Hayes, would sustain and delight Sacks until the end of his life a few short years later. *Insomniac City* describes the final years of the good doctor's life from Hayes' point of view. In addition, it is a nearly poetic description of the author's blossoming love affair with New York City, where he moved just before meeting Dr. Sacks. Some of the most enchanting passages relate delightful episodes in the daily life of this most fascinating of American metropolises. I enjoyed this book immensely, and reveled in the author's masterful juxtaposition of the tale of his two great loves: Oliver and New York.

In this fascinating and engaging memoir, author, Bill Hayes, beautifully interweaves a charming and intimate portrait of his beloved Oliver with the charm and mystique of New York City and its inhabitants. Simple yet poignant photos enhance his vivid and colorful descriptions of everyday New York life - enough to transport me, a die-hard suburbanite, to the urban wonders of his Manhattan neighborhood. What impressed me the most, however, was the blueprint for life that he and Oliver shared. From their frequent travels to their apartment rooftop rituals, they lived even the most minute details of life to the fullest. Well done Bill! I enthusiastically recommend *Insomniac City*!

This book is an utter joy to read! Especially if you love New York City. The author is like a wide eyed child - innocent amazed and happy with his new discoveries! Utterly devoid of pretense. The bonus is getting to eavesdrop on a beautiful love affair that transforms and changes both parties for the better, the author's relationship with Oliver Sacks.

Growing up in the Midwest, I never quite took to NYC. Whenever I visited there, I would scurry to Central Park every chance I got, seemingly allergic to the throngs, noise, pace and canyons created by the towering buildings. After reading *Insomniac City*, I feel like it was all just so many pearls before swine. In words and pictures, Hayes brings the beauty of the city and its people to life. His observational style reminds me of Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, but with more humanity and care. Intimate without being intrusive, Hayes honors both his deceased partners, Steve and Oliver Sacks with touching remembrances. Finally, there are Hayes' reflections on his own life which is the connective fiber that makes the book work. Using all these elements, Hayes has pulled off a literary form that would be impossible for a lesser talent.

Loss is like cut crystal. Beautiful in how it edges what is gone, and unforgiving as it slices through now and then. Bill Hayes knows loss beauty and the great gift of love. I read this in one sitting and a deeply recognized deeply inhaled one slow breath

For one who read Oliver's books for decades, this adds valuable insight . Much included here not mentioned before an supplements Oliver's own last book

A beautiful book about loss, love and what it takes to reinvent one's self as a New Yorker. I loved it.

This is a wonderful book. If you are an Oliver Sacks fan, I highly recommend this book written by his partner, Bill Hayes.

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