



# Off Ramp: Adventures and Heartache in the American Elsewhere

*Hank Stuever*

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*"I'm the one they send to the trailer park outside Chimayo, New Mexico, to see the place where the guy went crazy and shot somebody. I'm the one who gets sent to the monster truck show, Lollapalooza concerts, the world's biggest bridal fair. Readers warm to my style . . . unless it drives them to apoplexy."* -H.S.

**Take the off ramp to the world of Hank Stuever, a truly original writer who captures the humorous and haunting rhythms of modern American lives**

Hank Stuever's funny, touching reports take us to everyday places where the increasingly unusual realities of today's world run rampant. Stuever--twice a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize--calls this terrain the American Elsewhere. He finds it by bypassing Big News and taking off ramps to places where seemingly ordinary people lead lives just slightly off-kilter. Stuever's Elsewhere extends through trailer parks, roller rinks, malls no longer sparkling, and suburbs where robot dogs growl and bored children jump off rooftops using Hefty-bag parachutes.

From *Star Wars* conventions to credit disasters, from snipers to missing persons, there is always something happening in Elsewhere--and Hank Stuever never misses a scintilla of the action. In *Off Ramp*, his destinations include Plano, Texas, home of two friends both named Angie ("Plano princesses") who turn home décor disasters over to a TV decorating show and wind up at war against orange carpet. In Washington D.C., we meet a pony-tailed "sofa surgeon" who confronts the mysteries of the universe and couches that won't go through doorways. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, a spiral-permed secretary begins an odyssey toward marriage that takes her from anxiety dreams ("I'm walking down the aisle and nobody is looking at me or anything") to anxiety that is no dream. And we are there.

We visit discount funeral homes ("Let's say you're dead..."), campgrounds where international bonds are formed ("We are from Netherlands, and we are for two days wonderink, who it is you are storage facilities where America keeps its strangest secrets. We meet the men who drew the comic-book characters (including Wonder Woman) Stuever loved as a child professional bowlers, waterbed aficionados, and some Texans on "debris drives" in search of pieces of the fallen Columbia shuttle. Finally, we travel to Stuever's hometown of Oklahoma City where the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building has created a kind of Elsewhere he has never seen before.

You never know quite where Hank Stuever is going to take you. *Off Ramp* is the terrific debut of a fresh, humane, one-of-a-kind journalistic voice.



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