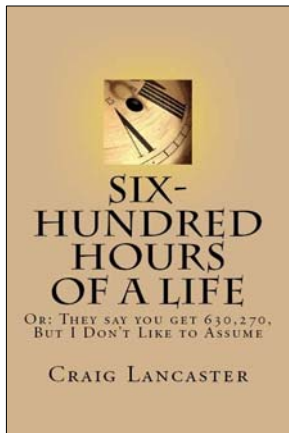


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## Review: *Six-Hundred Hours of a Life* by Craig Lancaster

Edward Stanton prefers facts. He also prefers people who are logical. People like his psychiatrist, Dr. Buckley, who gives him good, practical advice. But he especially prefers people like Joe Friday, the LA cop played by Jack Webb on *Dragnet*. Edward likes the way that Friday solves his cases by sticking to the facts and putting the pieces together.



Here are the facts of Edward Stanton's life. He is thirty-nine years old, a virgin, and he lives in a house his father bought him after 'the Garth Brooks incident,' where Garth Brooks' people issued a restraining order against Edward for sending 49 letters of complaint to Garth Brooks for ruining country music. Edward also lost his job at the county courthouse over this incident. Since then, he has started each day by rising between 7:37 and 7:40 every morning. For most people, the exact time would not matter, but Edward records the time each day, and can tell you exactly how many times he woke up at 7:39 for the year. He also records the weather forecast, which is always a little unsettling because it is not a fact. He prefers recording the actual temperature from yesterday, which proves yet again that yesterday's forecast was simply an estimate.

Edward eats at the same time each day, and of course, he ends every day by watching an episode of *Dragnet* at 10:00. He has all of the color episodes on tape, and he watches them in the sequence they aired. If for some reason he misses his allotted 10:00 time, he will not allow himself to watch the episode scheduled for that evening until it comes up again in the rotation some nine months later.

In case it's not obvious yet, Edward Stanton suffers from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. He has also been diagnosed with Asberger's, a mild form of autism that causes significant difficulties with social situations for those who suffer from it. But Edward is working hard to overcome these problems by following the advice of Dr. Buckley. For one thing, he has stopped mailing the letters of complaint that he writes every evening. He instead files them carefully in a filing cabinet, first inserting them into the folder for each recipient. He has also made efforts to get out into the world. For instance, he volunteered to answer calls for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, but that didn't go well because the system they used to mark their phone list was not logical. When he suggested a different system, they told him his services were no longer needed. He also attempted to join eHarmony but was informed that they could not find a match for him. So he has been forced to join a smaller internet dating site, which leads to a hilarious blind date with a woman allegedly named Joy.

Edward's life is finally disrupted for good when he goes to Home Depot one day to buy paint for his garage. When the clerk does not provide him with the proper guidance, Edward ends up buying three different colors of paint, which he then feels obligated to use. While Edward applies the first color, a young boy who just moved in across the street shows up and offers to help. Although Kyle, his neighbor's son,

doesn't paint the way Edward would like, and tends to talk more than Edward would like, Edward finds himself enjoying the boy's company, and this little crack in the routine starts a whole series of events that eventually change Edward's life.

In the hands of an average writer, *Six Hundred Hours of a Life* could be a real snore-fest, with the repetition of the narrator's daily routine, in the flat voice of Edward Stanton. But much as Kazuo Ishiguro did in *Remains of the Day*, Craig Lancaster brings a wonderful sense of humor and empathy to this man who struggles so hard to find a connection to the world around him.

Edward freaks out whenever feelings enter into the routine of his day, and nothing inspires feeling in Edward's life more than contact with other people. But Lancaster slowly and deliberately introduces more personal disruptions to Edward's routine, all of which lead to scenes and relationships where Edward must learn to deal with change. When we see Edward waking up outside of his four-minute range, missing episodes of *Dragnet*, and forgetting to record his data, we wonder whether he's cracking up. But instead, with wonderful feeling and humor, Lancaster brings this man to an awakening that we don't anticipate. From a life of routine and order, we see Edward Stanton come to life through his experience with a woman trying to protect a child, and through his own father trying in the most awkward way to protect Edward himself. It's a story told beautifully, and a transformation shown skillfully.

*Six Hundred Hours of a Life* is a self-published novel that deserves to reach a wider audience, and Craig Lancaster is a writer who we should expect more great things from in the future.