

# A Walrus With A Gold Tooth – Book Review

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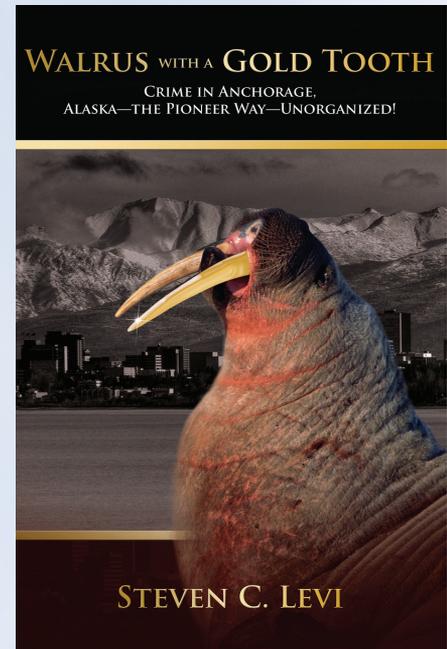
In the two decades between the Second World War and the Great Alaska Earthquake, Anchorage grew by a factor of 10. Money was, quite literally, washing down the street. The economic boom was so great that all you needed to make a million dollars was a cash register. At the same time Anchorage was one of the few cities in America where organized crime never got a firm foothold. Uptown, downtown, out of town, the locals were clever enough to keep the East Coast families out. *A Walrus With A Gold Tooth* is a fictionalized version of crime in Anchorage over these two decades and a step-by-step history of how the locals squeezed out the mob before it ever made it in.

In addition to being a good read, *A Walrus With A Gold Tooth* is a high quality teaching tool for the historian, high school student and city administrator. It is an unvarnished street-level look at a boom time. Every city in America wants one but when it comes, everyone laments the “good old days” when “things were a lot simpler.” The fact of the matter is that

money changes everything and the more money there is, the more complicated things become. Communities welcome the money but not the difficulties the money brings.

The author of *A Walrus With A Gold Tooth*, Steven C. Levi, is an historian who emphasizes the reality that “history is not the story of the past; it is the study of the future.” A nuts-and-bolts analysis of the birthing of any modern city is the same. The importance of this book for the city planner and city administrator is to see the future before it arrives. All cities are born and follow a similar growth process. First come the pioneers and there are no rules except those the pioneers make. Then comes the colonial period where the sons and daughters of the pioneers try to make money the old way but find ‘things are changing.’ They are followed by the settlers who bring the old rules from the ‘old country,’ to the new land. Finally there are the urbanizers who make the frontier ‘just like every place else.’ It takes most cities more than a century to complete this process. Anchorage, Alaska did it in less than 20 years and the growing pains were excruciating. To this day there

are people walking the streets who came to Alaska when it was a frontier – and still do business as if it still was a frontier! *A Walrus With A Gold Tooth* puts a human face on the joy and agony of a city’s transformation from frontier to metropolis.



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