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The New York Times
Friday, February 6, 2009

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No Regrets for a Love Of Explosives; In a Memoir of Sorts, a War Protester Talks of Life With the Weathermen

By DINITIA SMITH
Published: September 11, 2001

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"I don't regret setting bombs," Bill Ayers said. "I feel we didn't do enough." Mr. Ayers, who spent the 1970's as a fugitive in the Weather Underground, was sitting in the kitchen of his big turn-of-the-19th-century stone house in the Hyde Park district of Chicago. The long curly locks in his Wanted poster are shorn, though he wears earrings. He still has tattooed on his neck the rainbow-and-lightning Weathermen logo that appeared on letters taking responsibility for bombings. And he still has the ebullient, ingratiating manner, the apparently intense interest in other people, that made him a charismatic figure in the radical student movement.

Now he has written a book, "Fugitive Days" (Beacon Press, September). Mr. Ayers, who is 56, calls it a memoir, somewhat coyly perhaps, since he also says some of it is fiction. He writes that he participated in the bombings of New York City Police Headquarters in 1970, of the Capitol building in 1971, the Pentagon in 1972. But Mr. Ayers also seems to want to have it both ways, taking responsibility for daring acts in his youth, then deflecting it.

"Is this, then, the truth?" he writes. "Not exactly. Although it feels entirely honest to me."

But why would someone want to read a memoir parts of which are admittedly not true? Mr. Ayers was asked.

"Obviously, the point is it's a reflection on memory," he answered. "It's true as I remember it."

Mr. Ayers is probably safe from prosecution anyway. A spokeswoman for the Justice Department said there was a five-year statute of limitations on Federal crimes except in cases of murder or when a person has been indicted.

Mr. Ayers, who in 1970 was said to have summed up the Weatherman philosophy as: "Kill all the rich people. Break up their cars and apartments. Bring the revolution home, kill your parents, that's where it's really at," is today distinguished professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. And he says he doesn't actually remember suggesting that rich people be killed or that people kill their parents, but "it's been quoted so many times I'm beginning to think I did," he said. "It was a joke about the distribution of wealth."

He went underground in 1970, after his girlfriend, Diana Oughton, and two other people were killed when bombs they were making exploded in a Greenwich Village town house. With him in the Weather Underground was Bernardine Dohrn, who was put on the F.B.I.'s 10 Most Wanted List. J. Edgar

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Hoover called her "the most dangerous woman in America" and "la Pasionara of the Lunatic Left." Mr. Ayers and Ms. Dohrn later married.

In his book Mr. Ayers describes the Weathermen descending into a "whirlpool of violence."

"Every thing was absolutely ideal on the day I bombed the Pentagon," he writes. But then comes a disclaimer: "Even though I didn't actually bomb the Pentagon -- we bombed it, in the sense that Weathermen organized it and claimed it." He goes on to provide details about the manufacture of the bomb and how a woman he calls Anna placed the bomb in a restroom. No one was killed or injured, though damage was extensive.

Between 1970 and 1974 the Weathermen took responsibility for 12 bombings, Mr. Ayers writes, and also helped spring Timothy Leary (sentenced on marijuana charges) from jail.

Today, Mr. Ayers and Ms. Dohrn, 59, who is director of the Legal Clinic's Children and Family Justice Center of Northwestern University, seem like typical baby boomers, caring for aging parents, suffering the empty-nest syndrome. Their son, Malik, 21, is at the University of California, San Diego; Zayd, 24, teaches at Boston University. They have also brought up Chesa Boudin, 21, the son of David Gilbert and Kathy Boudin, who are serving prison terms for a 1981 robbery of a Brinks truck in Rockland County, N.Y., that left four people dead. Last month, Ms. Boudin's application for parole was rejected.

So, would Mr. Ayers do it all again, he is asked? "I don't want to discount the possibility," he said.

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