

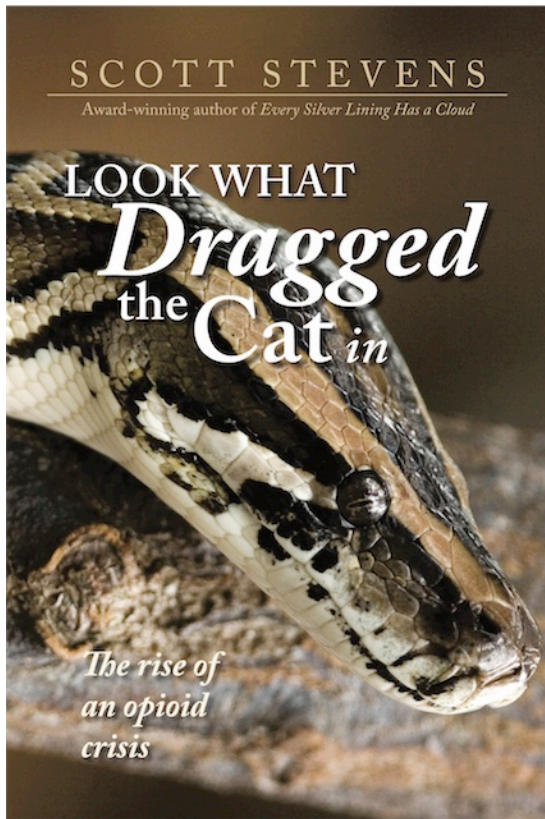
SCOTT STEVENS

Award-winning author of *Every Silver Lining Has a Cloud*

LOOK WHAT

*Dragged*  
the *Cat* in

*The rise of  
an opioid  
crisis*



*How many opioid deaths are alcohol-related? They all are. Drugmakers, dope dealers and physicians didn't incubate the crisis. The public misinterpretation stems from its love affair with alcohol. Look What the Cat Dragged In takes a deep dive into the Opioid Crisis, the suspects, failed solutions, and the way out.*

## **Look What Dragged the Cat In**

by Scott Stevens

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Also by Scott Stevens: *What the Early Worm Gets* (2010), *Every Silver Lining Has a Cloud* (2012), *Adding Fire to the Fuel* (2015), *I Can't See the Forest with All These Damn Trees in the Way* (2016), *The A-Files: Alcohol A-Z* DVD series (2016) and the *Alcoholology* app for Android devices (2015)

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## Chapter I

### **What we ignore, we permit. What we permit, we condone.**

*- Unknown*

Q: How many opioid deaths are alcohol-related?

A: They ALL are.

That's a tough pill to swallow. However, only when that hypothesis is accepted can we begin to challenge the global addiction epidemic. The antidote doesn't have to taste good to work.

'Epidemic' was used already in this book, right away in the first paragraph. I wanted to get that word out – front and center – before I got into the main body of this work because politicians and media have misappropriated the term in the decade of the 2010s. This word is incorrectly applied to the current opioid/opiate dialogue. I'll clear that language barrier a few paragraphs later. But first, a couple words about opioids and opiates.

The terms opioids and opiates are frequently – and mistakenly – used as interchangeable words for the same drug when they really mean two related drug classes. The media doesn't get that. I can be critical of media practitioners because I am among their ranks and have been since before Al Gore invented the internet.

- An opiate is a natural narcotic analgesic (e.g., painkiller) derived from the opium poppy. Think opium, morphine, and heroin.

- An opioid is a synthetic narcotic analgesic created in a lab to mimic or intensify or attempt to remove undesired inconsistencies of the natural product. Think OxyContin.

Physicians used to prescribe the former. They now prescribe the latter when other pain meds like ibuprofen or acetaminophen aren't strong enough. Street dope used to be only the former. Now street dope can be purely the former, impurely the former, or even mixed with the latter with usually disastrous outcomes.

I'm using 'opioid' throughout this text to mean both opiates and opioids for the sake of readability. From a dependency treatment standpoint, both classes are essentially equal in their abilities alter neurochemical processes in the body and change how the brain and body work over time. With the opioids, the carnage is often quicker. To explain the reason for that, I'm tossing out two words that will slay your opponent in Scrabble: Dolorimetry and pharmacopeia.

It all starts with pain. Dolorimetry (dolor is Latin for pain) is the measurement of pain in animals and, notably, humans are animals. If humans can measure it, they next want to fix it. There's a long human history of not tolerating pain and seeking a remedy for it. And from that we get the ancient Greek word pharmacopeia, the science or study of drugs, their preparation, properties, uses, and effects.

For thousands of years, opium was used to treat the pain. In the 1500s, laudanum (opium dissolved in alcohol) became the next generation. In the early 1800's, the most active part of opium, morphine, was extracted. A less active part - codeine, about two percent of opium - was also extracted. Merck went commercial with 'morephine' in 1827. Tens of thousands of Civil War soldiers became addicts. In 1874, heroin was first made by boiling down morphine in an attempt to find something twice as strong but less

addictive. They got it half right... and by most accounts a century and a half later: ALL wrong.

Opium was banned in the U.S. in 1905 and set in the opioid lab race, which really took off later that decade when Bayer (yes, *that* Bayer) stopped mass production of heroin because of its dangers. Oxycodone was born in the lab in 1916. It was hoped that oxycodone would retain the analgesic effects of morphine and heroin with less dependence. Nope. But it still lives on today as OxyContin and Percocet. Hydrocodone was first synthesized in 1920, approved in the U.S. in 1943, and became Vicodin in 1984. Hydromorphone (Dilaudid) was first synthesized in 1924. Methadone was created in a lab in 1937 to find something, again, less addictive than morphine and heroin in surgery. Epic fail. Janssen Pharmaceuticals gave us fentanyl in 1959.

Which leads us to the deadly trend of mixing into cheap street heroin even cheaper, illegal, impure modifications of fentanyl (like carfentanyl) thousands of times more powerful than morphine or heroin. By the way, that old opiate, morphine, is still among the World Health Organization's List of Essential Medicines because of its relative safety in comparison to the misbegotten offspring. However, we can't put the pharmacopeia toothpaste back in the tube and we have a opioid crisis today. That's the term selected for the rest of *Look What Dragged the Cat In*. Opioid crisis.

Now we're back to crisis vs. epidemic. Today's problem is a crisis. Not an epidemic. News departments ring the 'epidemic' bell to get more viewers. News is a business.

More connivingly, politicians call it an epidemic to make the crisis so large and so gripping that constituents get distracted and pay attention to the epidemic and not to the other stuff the politician should be doing but isn't. The sketchy strategy is known as Wag the Dog, from letting the tail wag the dog. The phrase is used to

indicate that attention is purposely being diverted from something of greater importance. A whole political dark-comedy film was made about it in 1997 starring a pile of entertainment heavyweights including Woody Harrelson, Robert DeNiro, Anne Heche, William H. Macy, Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, Jim Belushi, Denis Leary, Craig T. Nelson, Kirsten Dunst, and Dustin Hoffman. Two weeks prior to film's fictional reelection, the U.S. president lands in the middle of a sex scandal. In need of outside help to quell the situation, presidential adviser enlists the expertise of spin doctor, who decides a distraction is the best course of action. They fabricate a war. Once underway, the media is entirely focused on the war. Difference being, the movie's distraction was faked. The opioid crisis is real.

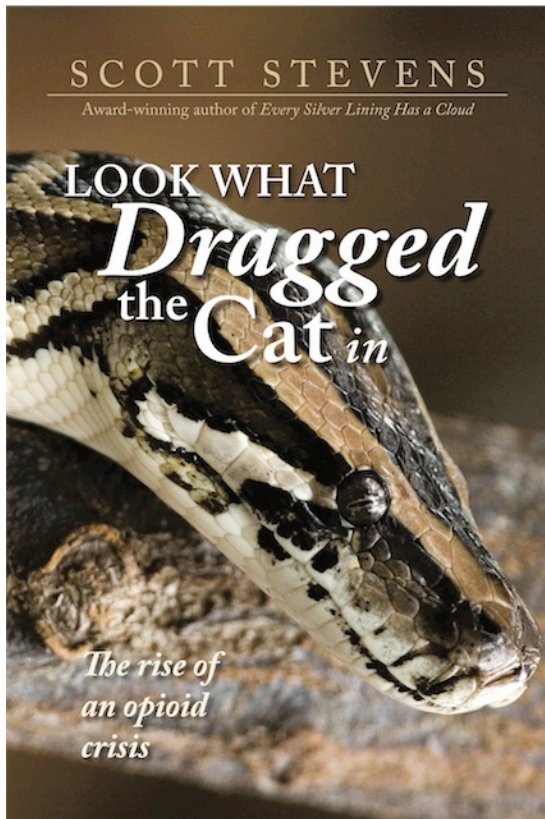
Wagging the dog *is* humorous, because we are suckers for it every time. However, there's nothing funny about a war, movie or real. There's nothing funny about the opioid crisis, which is very real. It's just not an epidemic.

An epidemic (from Greek ἐπι *epi* 'upon or above' and δῆμος *demos* 'people') is the rapid spread of infectious disease to a large portion of the population within a short period of time, usually two weeks or less. Its use as an adjective, as in 'epidemic proportions,' is commonplace. As a noun, its use is very specific. A yellow fever epidemic killed 10 percent of Philadelphia's population in three months in 1793... a Spanish flu epidemic killed 500,000 Americans in eight months in 1918. The current opioid crisis killed 50,000+ in 2016. By the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) numbers, 20,000 were synthetic opioids, 16,000 were heroin, 14,000 were other opiates or semi-synthetic opioids. The same year, 130,000 died from stroke, 87,000 died from Alzheimer's, and 54,000 died from flu and pneumonia. It's a matter of *agenda* which of those is or isn't a crisis or epidemic.

*The Rise of an Opioid Crisis*

Every single one of those 50,000+ opioid crisis deaths is tragic.  
Every one of them is alcohol-related.





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