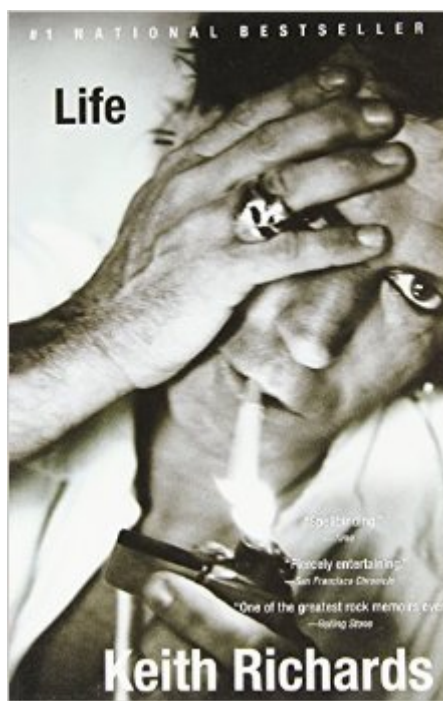


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Life



Synopsis

The long-awaited autobiography of the guitarist, songwriter, singer, and founding member of the Rolling Stones. Ladies and gentlemen: Keith Richards. With The Rolling Stones, Keith Richards created the songs that roused the world, and he lived the original rock and roll life. Now, at last, the man himself tells his story of life in the crossfire hurricane. Listening obsessively to Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters records, learning guitar and forming a band with Mick Jagger and Brian Jones. The Rolling Stones's first fame and the notorious drug busts that led to his enduring image as an outlaw folk hero. Creating immortal riffs like the ones in "Jumping Jack Flash" and "Honky Tonk Women." His relationship with Anita Pallenberg and the death of Brian Jones. Tax exile in France, wildfire tours of the U.S., isolation and addiction. Falling in love with Patti Hansen. Estrangement from Jagger and subsequent reconciliation. Marriage, family, solo albums and Xpensive Winos, and the road that goes on forever. With his trademark disarming honesty, Keith Richards brings us the story of a life we have all longed to know more of, unfettered, fearless, and true.

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Customer Reviews

Keith Richards. Right, he's the Rolling Stone you notice when Mick Jagger's not shaking and singing. The one who kicked his heroin addiction by having all his blood transfused in Switzerland. Who was --- for ten years in a row --- chosen by a music magazine as the rocker "most likely to die." Whose solution to spilling a bit of his father's ashes was to grab a straw and snort. Whose most recent revelation is about the size of Mick's equipment. Yeah, that's the guy. Wild man. Broken

tooth, skull ring, earring, kohl eyes --- he's Cpt. Jack Sparrow's father, lurching through life as if it's a pirate movie, ready to unsheathe his knife for any reason, or none. Got some blow, some smack, a case of Jack Daniels? Having a party? Dial Keith. When you get a \$7 million advance for your memoirs, there's no such thing as a "bad" image. But the thing about Keith Richards is, he wants to tell the truth. Like: he didn't have his blood transfused. Like: he didn't take heroin for pleasure or to nod out, but so he could tamp his energy down enough to work. Like: he and Jagger may not be friends but they're definitely brothers --- and if you criticize Mick to him, he'll slit your throat. Why does Keith want to undercut his legend? Because he has much better stories to tell. And in the 547-page memoir he wrote with James Fox, he serves them up like his guitar riffs -- in your face, nasty, confrontational, rich, smart, and, in the end, unforgettable. Start with the childhood. Keith grew up in a gray, down-and-out suburb of London. School: "I hated it. I'd spend the whole day wondering how to get home without taking a beating." By his teens, he'd figured the system out: "There's bigger bullies than just bullies. There's 'them,' the authorities." He adopts "a criminal mind." His school record reflects this: "'He has maintained a low standard' was the six-word summary of my 1959 school report, suggesting, correctly, that I had put some effort into the enterprise." His mother is his savior. She likes music, and is a "master twiddler" of the knobs on the radio. When he's 15, she spends ten quid she doesn't have to buy her only child a guitar. (No spoilers here, but much later in the book, you're going to fight tears when he plays a certain song for her.) The rest of the book? Keith Richards and a guitar --- and what a love story: "Music was a far bigger drug than smack. I could kick smack; I couldn't quit music. One note leads to another, and you never know what's going to come next, and you don't want to. It's like walking on a beautiful tightrope." What music interests him? Oh, come on: the music of the dispossessed --- black Chicago blues. Mick Jagger, who lives a few blocks away and is prosperous enough to actually buy a few records, also loves this music. To say they bond is to understate: "We both knew we were in a process of learning, and it was something you wanted to learn and it was ten times better than school." The Rolling Stones form. The casting is quite funny: "Bill Wyman arrived, or, more important, his Vox amplifier arrived and Bill came with it." Today bands dream of getting rich. Not the Stones: "We hated money." Their first aim was to be the best rhythm and blues band in London. Their second was to get a record contract. The way to do that was to play. Something happened when the Stones were on stage, something sexy and dangerous and never seen before. The Beatles held your hand. In 18 months, the Stones never finished a show. Keith estimates they played, on average, five to ten minutes before the screaming started, and then the fainting, until the security team was piling unconscious teenage girls on the stage like so much firewood. Fame. When it comes, there's no way

out; you need it to do your work. The Stones at least brought a new look to it; they provoked the press, didn't care what the record company wanted. Only the music mattered. As Berry Gordy liked to say, "It's what's in the grooves that counts." "The world's greatest rock band" --- between 1966 and 1973, it's hard to argue that they weren't. Songs poured out of them: "I used to set up the riffs and the titles and the hook, and Mick would fill in. We didn't think much or analyze.... Take it away, Mick. Your job now. I've given you the riff, baby." "Drugs? Necessary. In the South, a black musician laid it out for Keith: "Smoke one of these, take one of these." Keith would move on beyond grass and Benzedrine to cocaine for the blast and focus, heroin for the two or three day work marathon. Engineers would give their all and fall asleep under the console, to be replaced by others. Keith would soldier on. "For many years," he says, "I slept, on average, twice a week." With money and success, though, there's suddenly time to think --- in Keith's case, about all the things about Mick that drove him nuts. His interest in Society. His egomania. His insecurity. And his promiscuity: "Mick never wanted me to talk to his women. They end up crying on my shoulder because they've found out that he has once again philandered. What am I gonna do? The tears that have been on this shoulder from Jerry Hall, from Bianca, from Marianne, Chrissie Shrimpton... They've ruined so many shirts of mine. And they ask me what to do! How should I know? I had Jerry Hall come to me one day with this note from some other chick that was written backwards --- really good code, Mick! --- "I'll be your mistress forever." All you had to do was hold it up to a mirror to read it... And I'm in the most unlikely role of counselor, "Uncle Keith." It's a side a lot of people don't connect with me." If only it could be so simple as a man and his guitar! But there are other people involved, in close association, with a lot at stake --- and here comes the business story, the drug story, the power story. It's funny and silly. And, after a while, sad. Mick breaks away from the Stones and makes a solo record: "It was like 'Mein Kampf.' Everybody had a copy but nobody listened to it." Mick gets grand. Keith's lost in drugs. From 1982 to 1989, the Stones don't tour; from 1985 to 1989, they don't go into the studio. And now they are rich. Beyond rich. Every time they tour or license a song, their wealth mounts -- Keith, by most estimates, is worth at least \$250 million. It's ironic, really, for by any creative analysis, the Stones were over after "Exile on Main Street." And yet, here they are, almost four decades later, capable of producing the most lucrative tour of any year. Like so many things these days, music is about branding -- and there's no bigger brand than the Rolling Stones. Keith may slag his band mates; he'd never mock the Stones. Because the band is, if his version is accurate, really his triumph. Mick provided the flash, but in rock and roll, a great riff will always trump flash. A great riff will also trump time. We love rock for many reasons, and not the smallest is the way it makes us feel young, as if everything's possible and the road is clear ahead of us. And here

is Keith Richards, who never grew up and is now so rich he'll never have to. His story slows as it approaches the present, and you start to wonder if this Peter Pan life can get to its end without real pain. And you think, well, there's another side to this -- if Mick started writing tonight, he could have his book out before he's 70. But mostly, you wish you could go back to the beginning of "Life" and start again.

The first third of the book is absolutely fantastic. Keith Richards chronicles his childhood and the formation of the band with lots of personality and charm. Highly recommended. I really couldn't put the book down. The book loses steam in the middle third -- the drugged-out 70s. I wish a little more time was spent talking about the music. When he **does** write about how songs come together, or about musical insights he has (like discovery open tuning), it's great reading. The sections where his son Marlon talks about life on the road with his dad are interesting. But much of the middle just gets bogged down in all the drugs, the drug busts, the cold turkey sessions, etc. Yeah OK, that was his life, but they were still making records, and a better balance of material about the band and the music would have been a nice respite from all the drugs. It gets a bit better when he's writing about the late-80s/90s - the split with Mick and their respective solo careers. But the final section just falls apart. It reads like the anecdotes that celebrities tell on talk shows. "Ah, the funniest thing happened at my daughter's wedding" "The crew found a puppy hanging around near the stage" "You wouldn't believe the enormous snapping turtle" And there are some odd omissions: Bill Wyman is barely mentioned, which is fine, but more explanation is needed. Some of the biggest Stones albums are glossed over in half a page. Great songs like Shattered and Some Girls aren't even mentioned. The mixing and release of Tattoo You is barely discussed (if at all ... I don't recall now). So 5 stars for the first third / 3 stars for the middle / 2 for the end. Still worth it, especially for Stones fans.

This memoir, written with the help of writer James Fox, is an intricately detailed account of Keith Richards' life, both in and out of music-but mostly in. All the stories are here-the funny, the touching, the horrendous, and the amazing. Some are well known, some weren't even known to Richards-he only hears later, from others who were with him, what went on. And he's put it all in this book. Included are 32 pages of b&w and color photographs (including one of the band, with Jagger driving, in a vintage red convertible, across the Brooklyn Bridge) in two groups, plus photos throughout the book itself chronicling Richards' life. Also of interest is an early diary that Richards kept detailing the band's early gigs and impressions of the music the band played. Richards has

been known as many things-"the human riff", as some kind of prince of a dark underworld filled with drugs, booze, and skull rings, as "Keef", a rock 'n' roll pirate, as someone who should be dead (several times over) from massive drug use and other lifestyle choices, and as someone hounded by law enforcement-looking to incarcerate this bad example to all the kids. But Richards is also known as a settled (for him) family man. But somehow he's survived it all. And now, with this autobiography, he's letting us into his life. This book looks back at all the times-good, bad, and just plain strange. Beginning with Richards' boyhood in post-war England, no stone is left unturned in detailing his young life. A life which changed forever with his discovery of American blues. From that era the book details the formation of THE ROLLING STONES (I would like to have learned more about Brian Jones' in relation to the formation of the group), which changed his life again-a life he continues to the present. This book is important, interesting, and at times, harrowing, with a myriad of details surrounding Richards, his band, and anyone caught up in their universe of music, good times, misery, drugs, violence, and just plain weirdness. But the book also shows another side of Keith Richards. The pain he felt (and still feels) when his young son Tara, died while Richards was on tour. The loss of musician and friend/band hanger-on, Gram Parsons. Looking back with regret as people close to him sunk into a hellish pit of drug addiction. And Richards' own account of his years of drug use-especially heroin and the misery he brought on himself, even while he was careful not to go too far over the edge. Of course no memoir concerning Richards would be complete without accounts of the ups and downs, over many years, with Mick Jagger. There's a number of fascinating asides and insights concerning their ideas of what direction the band should follow. Unfortunately, but not surprising, Jagger (and the other band members) are not heard from. That's unfortunate because of all the valuable insight concerning Richards' life on and off the stage, and the inner workings of one of the world's greatest rock 'n' roll bands, that his long time band mates could bring to the story. But others who have known Richards over the course of many years were interviewed. People like Ronnie Spector, Jim Dickinson, Andrew Oldham, Bobby Keys, and a number of fellow musicians and friends, all have telling bits and pieces to add to the overall picture of just who Richards is. The detail Richards and Fox have put into this well written memoir is almost staggering. Reading about the early days of the band is exciting and fascinating, if for no other reason the era they came up in is long since vanished. The discovery and idolization of musicians like Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Jimmy Reed, Slim Harpo, and other blues greats, trying to emulate the hard scrabble lifestyles of American blues artists, the small scruffy clubs the band played in the beginning, living in abject poverty and squalor, the large concerts in later years, the songs, the albums, the drugs, and the many fascinating (and sometimes disgusting) characters that drift in and

out of Richards' life-it's all here. And taken together, this is a story only Keith Richards could live (and survive) to write about in such detail. While there have been other decent books on Richards and/or the Stones, for the straight, unvarnished truth, as he sees it and lived it, this is the book that matters. This memoir, written in a Richards-to-you conversational style, is interesting, exciting, gritty, informative, harrowing, and important. And with this book, written in his own words, we can't get much closer to the man and his life than that.

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