



# Gypsy: Memoirs of America's Most Celebrated Stripper

*Gypsy Rose Lee , Erik Preminger (Afterword)*

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**Gypsy: Memoirs of America's Most Celebrated Stripper** Gypsy Rose Lee , Erik Preminger (Afterword)  
Gypsy Rose Lee's memoir became a New York Times bestseller in 1957, inspiring the 1959 hit musical, two movies, and three revivals. Now a fourth, directed by Arthur Laurents and starring Patti LuPone, is lighting up New York, winning top Broadway theatre awards, including three 2008 Tony Awards, as well as raves from critics and audiences:

*"No matter how long you live, you'll never see a more exciting production."* —Terry Teachout, *The Wall Street Journal*

*"Watch out, New York! This GYPSY is a wallop-packing show of raw power."* —Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*

*"Not your ordinary theater experience. This is the best production of the best damn musical ever."* —Liz Smith, Syndicated Columnist

The memoir, which Gypsy began as a series of pieces for *The New Yorker*, contains photographs and newspaper clippings from her personal scrapbooks and an afterword by her son, Erik Lee Preminger. At turns touching and hilarious, Gypsy describes her childhood trouping across 1920s America through her rise to stardom as The Queen of Burlesque in 1930s New York—where gin came in bathtubs, gangsters were celebrities, and Walter Winchell was king.

Gypsy's story features outrageous characters—among them Broadway's funny girl, Fanny Brice, who schooled Gypsy in how to be a star; gangster Waxy Gordon, who fixed her teeth; and her indomitable mother, Rose, who lived by her own version of the Golden Rule: "Do unto others ... before they do you."

## Gypsy: Memoirs of America's Most Celebrated Stripper Details

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# From Reader Review Gypsy: Memoirs of America's Most Celebrated Stripper for online ebook

## Kelly says

Spoiler: Her life is really sad and her mom is pretty delusional. But I guess Gypsy turned out pretty normal. Or like, or normal as someone can be with no education and a delusional parent. Also. I LOOOOOVE that they always had so many pets, even into her adult life. Good read. Easy too. A lot of name dropping that I don't know because I'm too young to know but otherwise, very interesting perspective of a very interesting life.

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## Sherwood Smith says

Of course she finesses a lot of details--they all did. But the parts that ring true (because I've seen echoes in so many autobiographies and biographies of early film stars who started from similar beginnings) are the harrowing details of life in vaudeville.

I hope someone is doing a study of the life of the traveling players because that part of our history seems to have come to an end, and at least for the children dragged from flophouse to flophouse as their mothers and or fathers (usually mothers, I find) pursued their dream of fame and riches, maybe that's good.

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## Jennie says

The first half of this book was like candy for a musical theatre geek like me. It was fun to see where the musical came from - how awful Mama Rose really was in real life, how Louise and June were truly raised on the road, and how Herbie was more like a composite of a few different people than an actual person (though there was a similar character who the book referred to as "Gordon").

The afterword was also really sweet. Gypsy Rose Lee's son wrote about going with his mother to see the opening of the musical on Broadway, and about realizing during the song "Little Lamb" how desperately lonely his mother had been in her youth.

But the second half of the book, all about her navigation of burlesque, wasn't that exciting. Perhaps that's why it was shortened into about 2 songs in the actual musical... or perhaps it's \*because\* I couldn't find relatable content from the show that it didn't feel that compelling.

Anyway, it feels like a bit of musical theatre cred to my name that I've now read this memoir.

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## B. Barron says

The book is wonderful!

And she is/was one of us - a Geek. When she was a kid she would read 'Weird Tales' magazine.

She also had a wonderful way of looking at things, one in particular I adore:  
'You don't need to be religious to believe in God, just observant

If you have seen the movies you will love the book.

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### **Alex says**

Arthur Laurents once said Gypsy Rose Lee was "allergic to the truth", and while that might be true, this was still a fascinating book. I knew next to nothing about Gypsy Rose Lee - only what was shown in the musical version of this very book, but it got me interested enough to go out of my way to find this book and read it. And it was well worth the inconvenience. Even if the stories are slightly fudged, I get the impression that there is a great deal of truth in the book, and it is indeed a book worth reading. Gypsy was a very intelligent lady, and that intelligence shines through in her memoirs. Her tales of being a child in vaudeville and later her transition into the burlesque entertainer/strip-tease queen that we know her as today are engrossing, as is, of course, Madame Rose - the ultimate stage mother. If you get the chance I would definitely suggest picking up this book.

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### **Carrie says**

When I was lucky enough to play the role of "Louise" (aka Gypsy Rose Lee) in "Gypsy", I found and read her autobiography - self written, it was an amazing view into an unusual, dysfunctional family (a mother and two daughters) and into the life of a strong, intelligent woman who made a permanent mark in show business. I loved every word and felt like I knew her personally when I was done, for someone who loves performing, it is a must read!

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### **Maria says**

As usual, the book was way better than the movie!!!

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### **Carol says**

I enjoyed this book written by a famous stripper on which the musical "Gypsy" was based. My only complaint was how abruptly it ended. I was reading a first edition of the original 1957 version, so I do wonder if the updated version tells more of the story.

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### **Rebecca says**

Who knew that the most famous stripper of all time, Gypsy Rose Lee, wrote an autobiography? Well, she did. This is what the musical "Gypsy" was based on. If you like the musical, you will adore the book. It's full of hilarious stories about Gypsy's eccentric mother and goes much farther than the musical into Gypsy's life

after she makes it as a stripper. There's also a great collection of photographs. Gypsy's writing style is fun and easy to read--she's at her best writing humor.

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### **Alan M says**

Fun and interesting autobiography. Worth reading. Gives a great view on vaudeville and burlesque.

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### **Denise Mullins says**

When Christina Crawford's "Mommy Dearest" was released in 1978, it brought attention to family violence and the abusive nature of Joan Crawford towards her children. However, after reading Gypsy Rose Lee's memoir, the experiences she and her sister June endured with their mother make Joan Crawford appear like Mother of the Year. The book, written in the late 50s, is dedicated to Lee's son and intended to provide answers to his questions (ostensibly about her childhood and family life with her femininely "ruthless" mother). As a result, Rose Hovick emerges as the most narcissistic, manipulative, deceitful, and selfish matriarch imaginable, despite the "objective" first person narrative generously sprinkled with wry asides that Ms. Lee employs.

And although the style is quite entertaining with detailed glimpses of life on the road, the pathological infantilizing of June, and the insistence of denying Gypsy's femininity along with consistent deprecating remarks to destroy her self-confidence are disturbing to read.

Of course, it is understood that as a memoir, this book's veracity should all be taken with a healthy grain of salt, but if a fraction of this is true( and based on historic events from Rose Hovick's brushes with the law), it's still a strong indictment against a malevolent mom.

Unfortunately, this section of the book is also the most interesting as the rest neglects to mention Gypsy's own three divorces, her son, or her own life in depth once she escaped the constant control of her mother. The narrative becomes flat and merely seems to catalogue various performance reviews and work history. In fact, it leaves the impression that her life lacked any true sense of fulfillment, belonging, self-worth, or love. Sadly, an afterword by Rose's son that might have provided insight into her later life is also somewhat disjointed and vague. But perhaps this lack of closure ultimately embodies the famous burlesque queen whose performance relied on ribald humor and the ability to tantalize an audience as a substitute for those lacking essentials of her personal life.

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### **Emma Rund says**

I am completely blown away by Gypsy Rose Lee's writing ability... She wrote this book herself. It wasn't ghostwritten, and it's phenomenal. If she was as magical onstage as her writing was then I understand why she's famous. I was not expecting to be so blown away by this memoir. If you're interested in her life READ IT. It's so excellent.

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### **Julie says**

Interesting-a glimpse of the early days of entertainment in America.

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## **Paul says**

Having never been to a strip club or "gentleman's club," I can't judge the value or hilarity of Gypsy Rose Lee's act. The thing that impressed me about her was her intelligence, her great sense of humor, and her obsessive lifetime reading habit. Although I read another (much duller) book about her that tried to distinguish all her lies and stories from what actually happened, this book, however fast and loose with the facts, is really well-written. The first stories were published in *The New Yorker*, and they are the best, although the quality doesn't trail off until the last two or three.

Louise Hovick (Gypsy's birth name) had the stage mother from hell (although she didn't try to kill her, like Clara Bow's mother; or try to outdo her by breeding a red, white, and blue chicken, like Frances Farmer's mother). Gypsy's mother, Rose, was aggressive, a pathological liar and narcissist, and ruined Gypsy's and her sister's, June Havoc's, early life in vaudeville by forcing them to perform ridiculous simple-minded acts, in which June was "Baby June" until that no longer sold, then "Dainty June" until she was in her mid-teens, and she eloped with one of the boy dancers.

When it was just Rose and Louise after June and the boy dancers had left, Rose decided to take Louise into burlesque, "until vaudeville came back again," which it never did. Rose even signed her up to strip--although she never did all the way--and they played sleazy clubs in disreputable areas of cities. So Gypsy became the equivalent of a .400 hitter in triple A baseball, even though she continually tried to make it on the legitimate stage and was never able to.

Evidently her act consisted of her talking to the audience the entire time and doing such daring things as throwing pins into the tubas in the pit. She never claimed she could dance or sing, but her showmanship made her hugely popular. She lived a very wealthy life with at least two residences and a town car and decided she could never make the money in acting that she did in burlesque.

She wrote two murder mystery novels, at least one of which I intend to read, and was a fairly brilliant writer for someone who'd hardly had a single normal day of schooling. It was all from her reading, she said.

This book is really entertaining and gives a good glimpse into both the Roaring Twenties and the Depression. If the facts aren't always correct (for example, did her mother really shoot a cow from inside their tent?), the book is fun to read.

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## **C.S. Burrough says**

This 1957 memoir follows the early life of Ellen June Hovick a.k.a. Rose Louise Hovick, alias Gypsy Rose Lee, who became a legend in her lifetime.

The author was older sister of later Hollywood actress June Havoc. The pair began in Vaudeville as toddlers, managed under the tutelage of their mother. Baby June was the cute headliner with gawky Rose in the line up, the latter often in boys' clothes or a pantomime cow's rear end. When the maturing June deserted the act, Rose stepped out of the cow's behind and into the spotlight, becoming Gypsy. She became an icon of big time burlesque, as vaudeville outran its course and the options narrowed – she had to do something, with

mouths to feed and a mother who had kept her from any schooling. Showbiz was all Rose had ever known when she made this fatalistic transition.

She was a self-made lady, a raconteur, an entertainer of the highest order. Of the many (purportedly self-generated) myths about this original queen of reinvention, the greatest was that generated by the mists of time – that she was just a stripper. No such thing, she instead tastefully removed and discarded the odd glove, stocking or feather, shifting emphasis onto the 'tease' in striptease.

Also an actress, author, playwright and radio talk host, Gypsy turned her talents in many directions. She was a formidable intellect, admired collector of rare objets d'art and antiques, widely read, conversant on a glorious array of cultural topics and one of the best dressed women in the public eye. A renowned philanthropist, she gave generously to and supported a vast range of worthy causes.

Herein lies the inspiration behind Sondheim's blockbuster stage and screen musical *Gypsy*, considered by many the greatest American musical ever. Adaptations famously showcased a gorgeous young Natalie Wood in the 1962 movie's title role. As Gypsy's archetypal overbearing stage mother, Mama Rose, starred the wondrous Rosalind Russell, scoring the Golden Globe Award for Best Actress. Russell's role, earlier created onstage by 'brass diva' Ethel Merman, who won the 1959 Tony Award, became one of theatre's most coveted. Stage revivals have seen subsequent 'Mamas' Angela Lansbury, Patti Lapone and Bernadette Peters reap award after award.

This is a gorgeously written, marvellously entertaining read from a woman with a heart of gold and the sheer, glittering class of showbiz royalty. I adored reading her anecdotes in this delicious memoir, never wanting to put it down and making excuses for early nights with her.

Someone threw away the mold when this fabulous lady was made.

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