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Harley epitomizes hardcore punk rock that began for him at a very early age. Here's his controversial story.

Harley Flanagan: A Hardcore Life of My Own Details

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From Reader Review Harley Flanagan: A Hardcore Life of My Own for online ebook

Shannon says

I first saw the Cro Mags in either 88 or 89 (can't remember) when they were on tour with Destruction. This was at the Cubby Bear here in Chicago when the place wasn't a jock bar. Harley actually came and talked to myself and my (still to this day) best friend, Beth. It was a typical, destroy your fuggin' soul kind of show. I still have that flyer hanging up in my house.

I can only hope that Madonna, Billie Joe Armstrong and the dudes from Earth Crisis read this.

Harley is no Steinbeck or Tolstoy, but he gets his points across. He sticks to what has always been real to him, which I can highly respect.

The guy has been through some shit, no doubt about that.

I had always heard what an asshole JJ was, and this book solidifies a lot of things I myself have heard.

Thanks for the music (that is still played quite frequently at my house) and the memories of some of the best live shows I've ever seen.

P.S. I never once believed the bullshit story about Webster Hall. Thanks for clarifying.

Jeff Buddle says

Oh man, Harley. You can't write. Please don't pretend that this is anything but a gut spill, it's awful from a literary point of view. What's more, I get the feeling you're only writing this in reaction to your bandmate's book. "Here's my point of view," you seem to be saying.

That said, you sure have had a hell of a ride. Allen Ginsberg wrote the introduction to your book of poetry...a book published when you were 8 years old. Mr. G! That alone gives you NYC cred.

But you had to go and found the Cro-Mags. Not my favorite hardcore by any means, but good stuff. You're around when everything is happening, but you're not just an observer, you're a catalyst. Good for you!

You're a brawler, a fighter with a short temper. You don't help your case much. Thanks for this book though, it helps me understand you...and the Cro-Mags.

Elad says

Whoa! What a ride! A story that begins with young Harley as a kid during the hippie era, through the 70's New York Punk explosion, CBGB, the birth of Hardcore, Krishna Consciousness, LSD, street fights, skinheads, drug addiction, Jiu Jitsu Wizards, true friends, fake friends, back stabbers and redemption. A MUST READ for Cro-Mags/NYHC fans.

Andrew Nolan says

It's an enjoyable read, though far too long and propped up by too many stories about putting this guy in hospital for that reason. For all his lack of self-reflection at certain points - like his inability to distinguish later NYHCs gang era as being the inevitable outgrowth of the exact same shit he was into - Harley does come off as very likeable. I'd probably take this over John Joseph's autobiography, but neither of those dudes seems entirely reliable in their accounts.

Take a drink every time Harley complains he was severely misunderstood then immediately writes with great relish about kicking the living shit out of someone or dressing up like in an SS uniform and holding a "joke" white power rally in the streets.

But it's impossible for me to dislike the guy or this book, just look at the little munchkin hanging out with Debbie Harry, Andy Warhol, or The Clash when he was 7 years old.

And as much as i was starting to skim read the endless "then i beat the hell out of these guys" stories the tale of Harley taking on Earth Crisis whilst they were still in their tour van is absolute gold.

Michael says

BEST BOOK EVER. Harley is the motherfucking shit. So many crazy stories. Loved it.

Lukas Pimpfuneral says

Harley's War continues

Todd says

What a read. An entertaining, exhaustive account of the life of Harley Flanagan, founder of seminal NYHC band the Cro-Mags. From growing up in the Lower East Side to becoming a father, husband, and jiu-jitsu black belt, it's a fascinating account of a guy who seemed to be front and center for seemingly nearly every event throughout the development and history of the New York Punk and Hardcore scenes. There are points - several - throughout this book where I found my head spinning due to the accounts of fight after fight after fight; it just doesn't seem to stop! But for anyone even remotely interested in what NYC and the Lower East Side was like throughout the 70s and 80s, particularly when it comes to the advent of punk and hardcore and it's evolution throughout the subsequent decades, this book is certainly worth a read.

Emil Gilmanov says

It really was the punch in the face I wanted and needed.

Thomas says

"Ireland was also where I saw people fucking each other up with cue balls and cue sticks for the first time... I introduced the New York scene to [the cue ball]." (that's in the first 100 pages of the book... there ain't no way in hell I'm risking my life and giving this anything less than a perfect rating!)

I'd immediately jumped from West Coast punk deity Keith Morris' autobio (which I loved) to East Coast punk deity Harley's autobio and it's probably not fair to compare the two but Harley packed more in his first section than Keith did in his entire book.

Harley's feels like a great bs session at a party with a friend of a friend who doesn't give you a chance to catch your breath and everything is so over the top and insane that you can't help but love every second of it. (And I'm definitely happy to have never run into Harley and any of his crew when I started to go to shows in the late 80's.)

Over 400 pages and the majority of it is exactly like their demo (which is by far the best Cro-Mags release there was) - excessive, unrelenting, and definitely not for the weak. Harley's wrath extends to just about everyone (including himself) and that's what makes this a great read.

"I went through a lot of shit and it made me violent inside. So when I finally did blow up, I fucking exploded."

"That night, I was like, 'Yo, I can't take this shit anymore. I live in a squat with no running water, and I bathe in a fuckin' fire hydrant with a bucket.' I was doing this in February. People would be walking around in down coats, and me and John Bloodclot would be out there with liquid soap, doing sponge baths in the freezing fucking hydrant water."

Dave Lusby says

This book probably wants to beat you up. Harley Flanagan's life story is as crazy and brutal as the music he makes. Very few pages go by without someone getting beaten up, and an astonishing amount of the beatings were doled out by the author. To be honest, all the violence gets tiresome after a while and I would say that the book is saved by the recounting of the early days of NY punk and its eventual transformation into the legendary Hardcore scene.

Peter says

This is an impressive book. I've seen Harley perform on several occasions with several of his bands. On one of these shows I even had a short chat with him. He was very friendly but you could feel that he was on edge the whole time. After reading this book I understand why.

the book opens with his childhood and I must admit that I felt really sorry for him that he had to go through all those experiences as a child and a young teenager. He speaks full of love about his mom and aunt, but in these days he would have been taken away by social security. He talks about skipping school at the age of 8, about touring in a punk band at the age of 12, about being homeless and living in a squad at the age of 14.

And all these stories include lots and lots of violence.

Then he talks about the cromags days, both the good and the bad stuff. What this part of the book boils down to a lot is: "this or this character is not really though like me, so we got in his face and fucked him up". He also chronicles his ongoing struggle with addiction and self destructive behavior. I feel throughout the book that he has some sort of problem with Straight Edge, but I think that Straight Edge would have done him a lot of good.

The story ends with him describing the incident at Webster hall. I think the truth is probably somewhere in the middle between his accounting and whatever version of the facts JJ is giving.

There are a few drawbacks to this book though. The book is not written very well, but I must admit that I was still positively surprised by the way it was written. I've seen angry facebook posts by Harley that were a lot less readable. I also feel that some parts are a bit to repetitive. I fucked this dude up, and then I fucked this dude up etc...

Another issue is that this book is only readable by people who know about hardcore. Names and bands are casually mentioned and you are supposed to know who these people are. I had no problem understanding the hardcore parts, but there was part about MMA and there I was at a loss over the namedropping.

I also feel that not all accounts are 100% true. I think Harley indeed gives you the facts like he remembers them, but still some things might have grown in his head a bit. Or he might have misinterpreted things based on his upbringing and background.

What you feel throughout the whole book is that there is still a rage burning inside him, and that is probably the reason that he is still able to create records that blow 90% of the current though hardcore out of the water.

All in all a must read for everybody with love for Hardcore or the Cromags.

Marc Diepstraten says

I have been a Cro-Mags fan since The Age Of Quarrel came out. So reading through the years I knew that the history was incredibly turbulent. I read the accounts of Parris and John Joseph, but find the story of Harley most credible. After reading this the fact that he is alive and somewhat coherent is beyond comprehension. He should have been dead 100 times over. No holds barred, unforgiving and brutally honest about his live and failures to get to where he is now. A fascinating insight in the birth of punk / hard core and skinhead /oi! And lower east side New York before the cleanup. It is crystal clear that there will not be a Cro-Mags reunion in original lineup. At least we have The Age Of Quarrel, Best Wishes and Alpha Omega as a legacy. To me together with Agnostic Front the best of New York.

John Eder says

A vivid, violent,intense memoir of NYC as it was before it got cleaned up, featuring punk rock, hardcore, gigs, fights, famous people, infamous people, jiu jitsu, creativity, and the effort to stay on some sort of righteous path. Flanagan writes in a conversational way, like he is telling you the story face to face. He

captures the lawless vibe of the 80s on the Lower East Side, with brutal honesty, good humor and a historian's eye to NYC. At many points Flanagan notes, when describing some setting or other, that he could write a whole book about that place or scene. I would happily read those books.

Ed says

One star for the writing; five stars because he lived it.

Patricia says

This tells a story of a New York I never knew, and one way too crazy for a wimp like me. Sometimes (mostly, actually) a little too intense for comfort. At times I couldn't put it down, and at others I had to put it down, just to come back to some normalcy. Great memoir.
