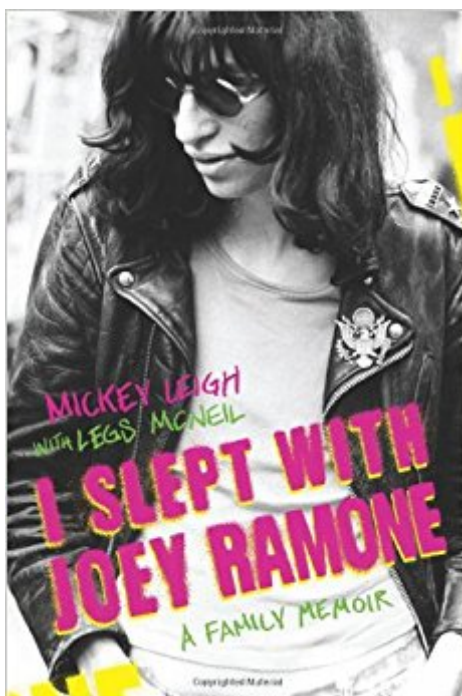


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# I Slept With Joey Ramone: A Family Memoir



## Synopsis

When the Ramones recorded their debut album in 1976, it heralded the true birth of punk rock. Fast and frenetic in their leather jackets and torn jeans, the Ramones gave voice to the disaffected youth of the seventies and eighties, influenced countless bands, and inspired the counterculture for decades to come. Born Jeffrey Hyman of Queens, New York, Joey Ramone was the quirky, extraordinary lead singer and cofounder of the band. Hiding his face behind signature sunglasses and a mop of dark hair, he helped define punk's early image, and his two-decade-plus tenure as the Ramones' front man made him unforgettable. Told by Joey's brother, Mickey Leigh, *I Slept with Joey Ramone* provides an intimate look at the turbulent life of one of America's greatest -- and unlikeliest -- music icons. With honesty, humor, and grace, Mickey shares the fascinating, sometimes troubling story of growing up with an emotionally distressed brother who becomes a rock star and the effect it had on their family. He shows how Joey used music to cope with mental illness; embraced the glam nightlife of the New York scene; launched CBGB alongside bands like the Talking Heads and Blondie; and brought punk to Britain, clashing with the Sex Pistols and changing music history. Ultimately, betrayal and infighting would end the band. While the music lives on for new generations to discover, *I Slept with Joey Ramone* is the enduring portrait of a man who struggled to find his voice and of the brother who loved him.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Singer-songwriter Joey Ramone, who cofounded the rock group the Ramones in 1974, died of lymphatic cancer at age 49 in 2001. Born Jeff Hyman in Manhattan, he grew up in Forest Hills,

Queens, with low self-esteem and what is described as an obsessive compulsive disorder, but he soon escaped to Greenwich Village, where he became a punk pioneer. Commercial success was elusive. While the Ramones remained an underground band, they are regarded today as a huge influence on the entire punk rock movement. Joey's brother, Mickey Leigh (who formed his own band), recreates that electric era, striking all the right chords in this dynamic biography. With skillful writing, he finds Joey's musical roots in their dysfunctional family life. As they attempted to deal with their mother's divorce and remarriage, the accidental death of their stepfather, financial worries and neighborhood bullies, their interest in rock, drugs and far-out fashions escalated. With angst-ridden anecdotes, the book traces the trajectory of the Ramones over two decades, from early gigs and recording sessions through sibling rivalry, feuds, fights, eccentric escapades and 2,000-plus performances before they disbanded in 1996. Leigh and Legs's mashup of memories with solid research makes for revelatory reading in this compelling portrait of a musical misfit who evolved into a countercultural icon. (Dec. 1) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Leigh (© Mitch Hyman) offers an insider's perspective on the household in which brother Jeffrey grew up and of Jeffrey's subsequent exploits in the Ramones (Jeffrey was Joey). Of recording with Phil Spector, Joey observed, "Phil would make us run through the song a thousand times . . . and then he'd get drunk, start stomping the floor, cursing . . . and that would be the end of the session." As for Joey's contentious relationship with tough-guy guitarist Johnny Ramone, Leigh quotes drummer Tommy Ramone: "Johnny liked Joey as much as Johnny liked anybody," which says much about the band's inner workings. Leigh illuminates Joey's mental health problems with his own memories, providing context for the struggle it was for Joey to assert himself. Eventually, Joey became the most quotable Ramone and the lyricist of such anthems as "I Wanna Be Sedated" and "The KKK Took My Baby Away." Adding the "first person accounts" of "family, friends, colleagues, and industry professionals" to his own testimony, Leigh makes an essential addition to the Ramones files.

--Mike Tribby

A good but not great account of the Ramones and Joey, a great story about the love of two brothers. As for the Ramones, not a lot new here. Like Monte Melnick, Mickey uses a lot of quotes you've read before or seen in youtube interviews. I've read all the Ramones books now, and have yet to read a great one, but maybe cause it wasn't that great an experience for them. Johnny was a

tyrannical jerk, Joey was often sick and suffered with OCD, and Dee Dee was Dee Dee. They drove each other nuts, which I think was a product of growing up in a time & place where kids picked on each other. These guys never stopped. I'd heard Dee Dee claim it was a sad life and I believe him. The brother dynamic was really interesting. Joey was dealing with problems he couldn't understand, and that naturally affected his whole family. I think Mickey does a good job explaining how he felt and what he went through as "the kid brother of Joey Ramone". Like most, he doesn't hide his disdain for Johnny "Furor", and most of his Ramones writing is about the early years when he was the roadie. If you love Joey though, and who doesn't, this is worthwhile. This is as good as Melnick's book. Dee Dee's are fun too, but more like fiction. Commando was Johnny's "version" and the worst, and Marky's book was just okay. Long live the memory of the Ramones!

This book is a wonderful insight into the birth of punk music, and as a fan of both the punk genre and the Ramones specifically, it was a very intimate look inside for me, and I loved it for that. It is well worth the read for the historical value alone. More than that though, it introduced me to a person I never knew - Jeff Hyman. I was a pool of tears at the end of the book, which concludes with Joey Ramone's passing. By this point though, I was no longer thinking of him as "Joey Ramone", but as Jeff - a man who suffered from birth to death with one ailment or another, of one type or another, whether it be physical, emotional or mental. After reading the book, I almost felt dirty thinking of him as anything other than Jeff. I still love the Ramones for their music and what they did historically in music, but my heart breaks for the man who was Jeff Hyman. I just wanted to make his hurting stop and make all the pain go away. Mickey, thank you for introducing us to your brother and your family. I'll never look at "Joey" the same way again.

Mickey (Joey Ramone's brother) did a great book!! Very insightful, entertaining, interesting and just a great read. What a "catchy" title too!! Just like the Ramones songs! It is so sad they never made it big, but maybe that was a good thing, as it kept them putting out song after song, album after album of great music. They all had such an impact on the music world and many, many bands that are huge today owe many thanks to the Ramones as it was their inspiration. Jeff's (Joey) untimely death was so sad, as the death of all the original band members is sad. Marky, C.J. and Ritchie are still with us, Marky and C.J. still going strong, but there will never be another Ramones. I was blessed to have "grown up with the Ramones", not in the same neighborhood, but with their music, from their very first album, I had it and it only got better. The concerts were truly a treat, with all the members being a STAR, Dee Dee on Bass, Johnny blasting away on the strings, Tommy (then Marky)

beating the drums and Joey, grabbing the mic and pounding his fist in the air. There was nothing like it before and can never be another, it was THE RAMONES!!

I was in the music scene at the time much of this book takes place, but far removed from the New York scene. As a result I've met many of the people in Mitch's book, but wouldn't push the envelope by calling them close personal friends. It was a time when all of us spent a lot of time frying our brains and convincing ourselves that what we were doing really mattered. Mitch captures that atmosphere well in the first half of the book but seems to lose touch with the realities of it as his story progresses. I was both eager and a bit fearful as I approached this book because I didn't know Mickey's motives. I watched Richard Carpenter, for example, spend years trying to make a buck off of his sister Karen's death - even going so far as to change up lyrics and sing songs like, "She'd only just begun.... to live." I hoped that Mickey hadn't started down that sickening path. The good news is that for the most part, he never gives the reader a sense that this is an attempt to bankroll his brother's notoriety. The bad news is that he does waste a lot of time trying to rewrite history in order to paint himself in a better light - at the expense of Joey's (Jeff's) reputation. I saw the Ramones a number of times and in fact was backstage (if you could call the open area a "backstage" at all) at the show he mentions at Frolics up in Salisbury, Mass. The tension between Johnny and Joey was obvious and their respective entourages quickly separated into camps on opposite sides of the room. The problem with this book is that while it is very detailed and honest about some aspects of the band, there are huge gaps and outright falsehoods as well. The first half of the book does a great job in describing how the core band came together. But like many others, Mickey buys into the legend. Anyone even on the fringes of the business at that time knows the legend of the Ramones. They know the story of how other bands zoomed past the Ramones and became millionaires while the Ramones languished in near-poverty. The tale ends with the embittered band calling it quits frustrated and enraged that they never made the big bucks or booked the stadium tours they always dreamed of. Sadly, this isn't the entire truth. Yes, other bands were more successful. But the Ramones didn't exactly starve. Crowds in England, Germany, and several other countries were ten times the size of the usual turnout for their American shows. The band made enough money that Joey owned several residences. They never recorded a platinum album, but they had a large enough core audience that they could bank on sales in the hundred-thousand copy range for all but their last few albums. If you know what you can dependably expect in revenue, it makes it a lot easier to budget how much you spend in production to ensure a profit. Additionally, they were heroes in many countries and their records were hot

sellers in smaller but passionate markets around the world. When the band "broke" in South America much of their music was sold on the black market because the label couldn't distribute enough legal copies quickly enough to keep up with the demand. Sire regularly screwed its artists over on royalties, but that's as common throughout the music business as the use of the "C" chord. The actual truth is that it was an exponential thing. As their bitterness at not becoming household names grew, the quality of their music and their self-abusive behaviors were affected accordingly. They were always an odd construction and became trapped in their own formula, eventually becoming a parody of themselves. Mickey's book provides some sort of explanation as to the processes that caused it to happen the way it did - but only to a point. The Ramones began to approach the cusp of true success and somehow it all fell apart. It is at this exact moment in the Ramones legacy that Mickey decides to take a sharp turn away from the story of his brother's band and begins to focus on his own personal woes. He devotes the remainder of the book to relating his own relationship with his mother, his falling out with Joey over royalties and record credits, his own drug arrest and so on. While he makes a half-hearted attempt to explain his feud with Joey by blaming it on Johnny Ramone, it's clear that Mickey's real issues are with his brother. I would much rather that Mickey had devoted more pages to what happened in the last half of the Ramones career as a band. He implies that the Ramones never dented the singles chart, but they did have a moderate hit with "(do you remember) Rock & Roll Radio." It actually got a little airplay and was included in compilation albums and "best of the 70s" collections. Mickey barely brushes up against this song, mentioning that he and his brother would listen to their transistor radios in bed at night as kids. (The chorus of the song says, "do you remember lying in bed with the covers pulled up over your head, radio playing so no one can see?") The song itself is very autobiographical and alludes to many of the childhood events that Mickey mentions in the early part of the book. It was also a turning point in the fortunes of the band. After that song it seemed nothing went right. The Rock & Roll High School movie bombed and their subsequent albums seemed like afterthoughts. I've always wondered what event or events brought about the change. Was it bad management? The exit of one of the core members? Joey's OCD? Unless someone else close to the story decides to write a book (and there are very few left alive to do so) we'll never know the full truth. In fact, Mickey completely ignores some of the excellent music the band created in the later years and doesn't even mention albums like "Acid Eaters", "Adios Amigos," or "Too Tough To Die" which contained another near-hit for the band with "Howling at the Moon (Sha-la-la-la). He also skips the recruiting of the band by Steven King for the Pet Semetary soundtrack. I had hoped the presence of Legs McNeil as co-author would have kept things on track, but alas such is not the case. Mickey also

claims that Joey suffered from Spina Bifida as a result of one of his surgeries. This is almost assuredly incorrect. Spina Bifida is a birth defect and is not a surgical side effect. It sounds more like Jeff (Joey) suffered from birth defects caused by an undeveloped conjoined twin. He may have had Spina Bifida Occulta - a minor form of the birth defect that does have some neurological impact but isn't as serious. John Cougar in fact, was born with Occulta. Joey did have the odd gait and posture of someone with the condition. I don't believe this was Mickey lying about Joey's health issues so much as I think it represents laziness on his part. He had access to the medical records and if he had taken the time he could have done a better job with the health diagnoses he presents - especially considering how they affected the lives of those involved. I also would have loved to have heard how it was that Green Day wound up inducting the Ramones into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame since they only receive a somewhat unflattering mention toward the end of the book. "I Slept With Joey Ramone" is a decent read. But it would be a mistake to accept it as THE definitive Ramones biography. Far too many of Mickey's personal issues seep into the book - particularly in the last third - and it leaves many questions unanswered. I gave it a 3 star rating because Mickey deserves a heartfelt thank you from every Ramones fan for relating at least part of Joey's life story. More important than that however, he tells us with great affection of Jeff Hyman's last few moments on earth and how he expired doing what he loved most - listening to good music that eased his heart and soul. Every single person that has loved Ramones music wishes they could have been there to say goodbye to Joey Ramone and, thanks to Mickey, now we can feel and share what that must have been like. If I ever get to meet Mickey again I'll want to shake his hand and thank him for the gift of that shared intimacy. For me - one of the countless casualties of the vain struggle to keep rock & roll alive - it made the book worth more than twice the cost.

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