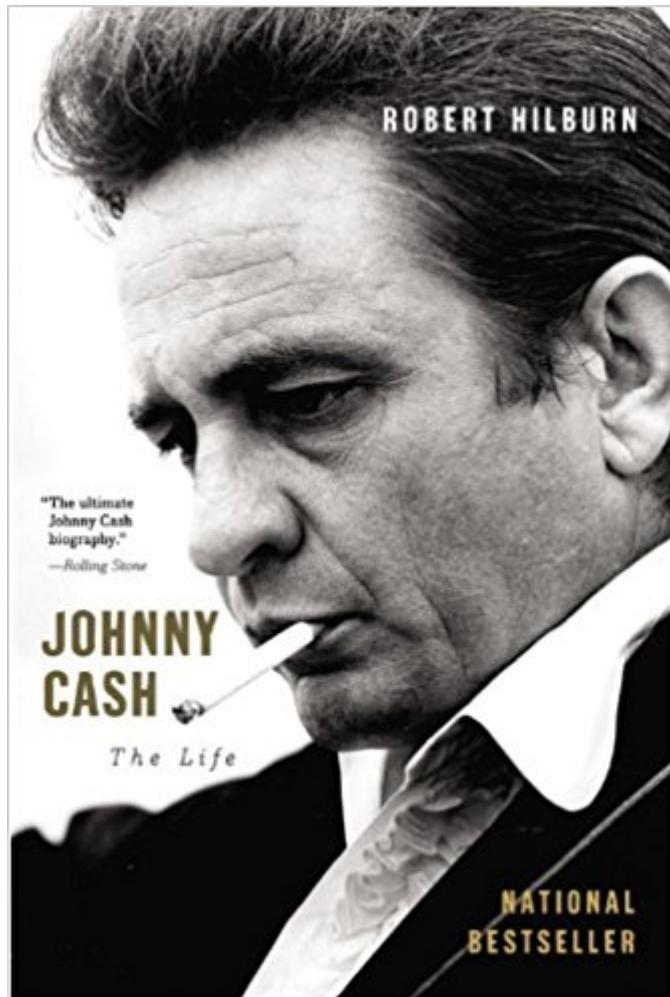


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# Johnny Cash: The Life



## Synopsis

The national bestseller celebrated as "the ultimate Johnny Cash biography....Rock writer great Robert Hilburn goes deep." -- Rolling StoneIn this, the definitive biography of an American legend, Robert Hilburn conveys the unvarnished truth about a musical superstar. Johnny Cash's extraordinary career stretched from his days at Sun Records with Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis to the remarkable creative last hurrah, at age 69, that resulted in the brave, moving "Hurt" video. As music critic for the Los Angeles Times, Hilburn knew Cash throughout his life: he was the only music journalist at the legendary Folsom Prison concert in 1968, and he interviewed both Cash and his wife June Carter just months before their deaths. Drawing upon a trove of never-before-seen material from the singer's inner circle, Hilburn creates an utterly compelling, deeply human portrait of a towering figure in country music, a seminal influence in rock, and an icon of American popular culture. Hilburn's reporting shows the astonishing highs and deep lows that marked the journey of a man of great faith and humbling addiction who throughout his life strove to use his music to lift people's spirits.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Big Fall Books Preview 2013: To adequately describe Johnny Cash: The Life, it helps to begin with the author. For more than thirty years, Robert Hilburn worked as a music critic at the Los Angeles Times, rubbing shoulders with the greats of the industry--Dylan, Lennon, Joplin, Springsteen, U2, and many others. But this tenderhearted, penetrating biography stands as an argument that he knew Johnny Cash best. Cash was an unlikely artist, born in debt-poor Arkansas

to cotton farmers. He began working (and singing) in the fields at the age of five; and from there, Hilburn--who counted Cash as a friend and was the only music journalist at the famous Folsom Prison concert--draws from his extensive personal interviews with the singer, as well as new material from Cash's inner circle, to create a biography that is both compassionate and clear-eyed. As he details the stunning rises and tortuous stumbles of The Man in Black, Hilburn conveys an intimate, consuming, human portrait of the drama, the art, and the purpose that made the man a legend. --Chris Schluemp --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

The bare bones of Cash's story are widely known: the singer-songwriter's childhood years as a farmer's son longing to make music, his early hits, his descent into substance abuse, his tumultuous personal and professional life. Here, Hilburn, who covered music for the Los Angeles Times for more than 30 years, puts some meat on those bones. Did you know, for example, that when Cash moved to Memphis, he hadn't heard of producer Sam Phillips, or Sun Records? And did you know that the lyrics of Cash's early hit, Folsom Prison Blues, were lifted, not quite word-for-word, from Gordon Jenkins' Crescent City Blues? The book is based on previously published material and on the author's interviews, over the years, with numerous sources, including Cash and his family; Phillips; musicians such as Kris Kristofferson, Merle Haggard, Bob Dylan, and Tom Petty; and many of Cash's friends and colleagues (each chapter is thoroughly sourced). It's always tricky to call a biography definitive, but this one must surely come close. --David Pitt --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

I've read Robert Hilburn for more than 35 years, and have always found his writing to be accurate, fair, and passionate. While I've never been a big fan of country music, I've come to appreciate Johnny Cash more and more over the years - especially his American Recordings albums with Rick Rubin. I learned so much about the origins of Sun Records, Cash's passion for underdogs, his battle with addictions, his need for affirmation, and his physical ailments at the end of his life. As a Christian, I was interested to see how Hilburn handled Cash's faith, which was quickly glossed over in the film Walk the Line. In my view, Hilburn bent over backwards to represent Cash's faith and love for gospel songs in a way that would have pleased Cash no end. I didn't sense one syllable of ridicule for Cash's beliefs. Hilburn's extensive interviews with Cash's family members, friends, and females were enlightening and contributed toward a well-rounded portrait of the man. Their commentaries on key events in Cash's life added emotion and insight to his sometimes erratic behavior. But what I appreciated most about this book is that Hilburn continually focused on Cash's

music, quoting Cash's lyrics at key junctures and letting Cash explain why he wrote and played certain songs. Cash was always at its best when he was authentic, which is why I love the American Recordings albums so much ... usually just the man and his guitar. Since there are hundreds of Johnny Cash albums available on CD - many of them compilations - Hilburn's recommended purchases at the end of the book will save readers much time as they seek to delve into his music. I appreciated Hilburn's previous book *Cornflakes with John Lennon* and love this book as well. Because Hilburn respects both his subject and his audience, this book deserves a wide readership. I tried, but couldn't put it down ... and most likely, I'll pick it up again soon. Like its subject, this book is a winner.

Looking for my next book, I decided a few months back to research all of the Cash biographies/auto-biographies that had been written, and last week chose the one which had the best reviews/feedback over all the others. And now I'm glad I chose this one as it takes a much deeper look into the complete history while even sharing some accounts from a few of the other ones out there. From growing up literally "dirt poor", to starting his career/rivalry with (and actually outselling) Elvis, to his lifelong Faith/Belief and subsequent struggles with family and addiction, to all of the other icon friends he had along the way and then actually making albums while on his deathbed.....this long (and detailed) book was very hard to put down once I got started. All it did was reaffirm how much of a true legend the Man In Black was, and still is today. Just sharing this for any of my other friends that are "readers" of musicians, no matter what genre. I've read numerous memoirs over the years and I can honestly say that I am putting this one right next to *The Dirt* and *I Am Ozzy* as my all-time favorites of a completely detailed and awesome story.

Outstanding and thoughtfully researched biography of a great American talent. Hilburn's thorough research and quiet admiration for Johnny Cash have created a deeply moving portrait of a giant in the musical landscape of America. Cash's deep faith enabled him to survive and his God given talent elevated his music to the very top of artistic charts. His empathy for others who were down and out and down trodden flowed through his songs and his entire troubled life. By listening to the music referred to throughout the book it became an even richer experience. Rarely is genius shares so well.

Robert Hilburn's *Johnny Cash: The Life* is an exhaustive look at the life of this legendary country artist. Few contemporary musicians are worthy of a biography of this depth, but Cash is definitely

one of them. Johnny Cash's tale is the stuff of legend with the man's larger-than-life addictions, talents, and sprawling, messy, often-contradictory life. Hilburn wisely focuses on Cash's music and vision, providing an overview of Cash's recordings, praising his innovation and integrity, but not shying away from pointing out when Cash had lost his muse and was merely phoning it in. The book's final section deals with Cash's triumphal American Recordings sessions with Rick Rubin. This was a period of great physical pain and loss of loved ones in Cash's life; what is amazing is how he persevered and created some of his finest songs and interpretations during this time. Hilburn's expertise as a music writer serves him well; the story is masterfully told and provides a deeper insights into Cash's life and music - both for longtime Cash fans and those who are new to his life and work. I had the privilege of seeing Cash perform four times - 1973 at the height of his fame, the late 1980's with the Highwaymen, the early 90's after his first American Recording CD (this was great since he did a solo acoustic set and was fully engaged during the entire show), and one of his final appearances in Minnesota at the Medina Ballroom in 1995. I'll always remember these glimpses of a legend.

I'm not sure why I downloaded this book - I have never been a big Cash fan. However, it was a very good book on his life and the man he was. I so much more appreciated him after reading it. He never gave up - even though it seems the public and his fans did give up on him...his record label certainly did. Then, Cash finally meets this amazing man towards the end of his life that really takes his time with Cash to get him "back to his roots" - I also didn't realize Cash remained on drugs most of his life - and he lived to age 71. I guess Presley wasn't the only one, it seems, who had affairs and did drugs. Seems like most of those guys did! One has to wonder why. This was an excellent book however. I enjoyed getting to know Johnny Cash a little better. Also really great how June Carter Cash STUCK BY HIM through all of that. She was his savior in many ways.

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