

From: Ebeling, Betsy <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, October 22, 2010 11:03 AM
To: H
Subject: for your mom.....

B6

Keith Richards Has Memories to Burn

By JANET MASLIN

It is 3 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time in the New York office of Keith Richards's manager, a place that might look ordinary if every wall and shelf were not crammed with some of the world's most glorious rock 'n' roll memorabilia. Mr. Richards has a 3 o'clock appointment. "Come on in, he'll be here in a minute," an assistant says — and here he comes *in a minute*, at 3:01. This from a man who once prided himself for operating on Keith Time, as in: the security staff ate the shepherd's pie that Keith wanted in his dressing room? Then everyone in this packed stadium can bloody well wait. The Rolling Stones don't play until another shepherd's pie shows up.

Chalk up the promptness to the man's new incarnation: he is now Keith Richards, distinguished author. True, he is far from the only rock star to turn memoirist, and far from the only Rolling Stone to write a book about himself — very much about himself. The raven-haired Ron Wood wrote "Ronnie," in which he described Brian Jones as "me in a blond wig." Bill Wyman, the band's retired bass player and bean counter, wrote "Stone Alone," in which not a 15-shilling demo disc went unmentioned. Now Mr. Richards has written the keeper: "Life," a big, fierce, game-changing account of the Stones' nearly half-century-long adventure.

"It's the most difficult thing I've ever done," he says about the book. "I'd rather make 10 records."

But he sounds anything but weary. And he seems refreshed, bearing surprisingly little resemblance to the battered, kohl-eyed pirate Keith Richards who looks like 50 miles of bad road. Today, in neutral street clothes and hot-green shoes, he is positively debonair. On his hands: the ubiquitous silver skull ring, swollen knuckles, the thin white scar from a hunk of steaming phosphorus that burned his finger to the bone while he played through a concert without stopping. On his head: both a headband and a raffish, straw-colored hat, gray tufts poking out in all directions. Not a single gewgaw hangs off it. "I've been through that phase," he says. "Don't know that the hair will take the pressure anymore."

He's been through quite a lot of phases. And they're all on the page in "Life": the Boy Scout (really); the tyro rocker; the lovestruck kid (mad for Ronnie Spector, unbeknownst to Phil Spector); the astonished new star; the heroin-addicted older one; the jaded veteran of countless world tours; and the longtime sparring partner of Mick Jagger. (Despite tabloid shock over the bickering in the book, these two have seriously been calling each other names at least since the early 1980s.) All of this is recounted with straight-up candor, and some of it is easily sensationalized. But the book's single biggest stunner is a hand-written note on its jacket flap: "Believe it or not, I haven't forgotten any of it."

How, he is asked, is this humanly possible from a man as well known for stupefaction as "Satisfaction?" "I think my main concern at the beginning was whether my memory was really reliable," he says. "Fox had to do a little sleuthing." Fox is James Fox, the journalist and author of "White Mischief," who has been Mr. Richards's friend over many years and was his collaborator in putting "Life" together. (It was sold to Little, Brown & Company for a reported advance of more than \$7 million.)

Mr. Fox wound up researching Mr. Richards's past, conducting interviews with those who knew him long ago and drawing upon wonderfully candid old letters and journal entries. "Spent day practising," the 19-year-old Mr. Richards wrote in January 1963, when the Stones were just beginning to play in public. "Worthwhile, I hope!" Also exhumed: a 1962 letter from Mr. Richards to his Aunt Patty describing a boy he had known in primary school, Mick Jagger. He signs off "Luff/Keith xxxxx"

These artifacts turned out to be the Richards equivalent of Proust's madeleines, though Mr. Richards, whose reading taste runs to naval history and the novels of Patrick O'Brian and George MacDonald Fraser, would hardly put it that way. In any case they prompted recollections that he never expected to rediscover, and "Life" began to click. Once his stories were told and a draft was written, he and Mr. Fox wound up sitting together with separate copies of the manuscript as Mr. Fox read

the whole book aloud. "What I couldn't guess was that he'd be such a very good natural editor," Mr. Fox, reached by e-mail, says of Mr. Richards. "He cut, accordingly, for pace and rhythm — a real musical cut."

As for calling the book "Life," Mr. Richards did some editing there too. "My Life" was what the book was to be called. "I said 'I tell you what, just cut off the 'My,' and you've got a title," he says. He might just as appropriately have used another title he likes, "Keep It Dark." But, he says, "I'm saving it for a song."

The contents of "Life" are dark enough already. The book begins with a 1975 drug bust in Arkansas and a judge who was persuaded to free Mr. Richards after confiscating his hunting knife (which still hangs in the courtroom) and having a picture taken with him. How did Mr. Richards get so lucky? "I really can't explain it," he says, deadpan, about that now. "Maybe I've got an honest face."

It covers many other arrests too, as well as Mr. Richards's grueling efforts to kick his heroin addiction, which he claims to have done successfully 30 years ago. "Stories like this aren't told very much," he insists. "There aren't many people willing to tell them."

Then there are the other health hazards that the book describes. Like electrocution. "My most spectacular one was in Sacramento. ..." he now says with a smile, drifting off into a fond-sounding reverie that involves a guitar string touching an ungrounded microphone and clouds of smoke billowing out of his mouth. He has a good laugh at the memory of finding himself in a hospital and hearing a doctor say, "Well, they either wake up or they don't."

"Life" has already attracted undue attention for a schoolyard-sounding anatomical swipe at Mr. Jagger. But this is a book that pulls no punches, and most of its disses are more serious than that. "Cold-blooded" and "vicious" are only two of the more printable words he uses to describe Brian Jones. Allen Ginsberg was an "old gasbag." Mick Taylor, the former Rolling Stone, "didn't do anything" after he left the band, and Donald Cammell, the film director ("Performance," starring Mr. Jagger and Anita Pallenberg, Mr. Richards's longtime lover and partner in crime), couldn't commit suicide quickly enough to suit Mr. Richards. (He shot himself in 1996.) When Marlon Brando propositioned him and Ms. Pallenberg, Mr. Richards remembers replying with this: "Later, pal."

As for Mr. Jagger, the complaints are deep-seated. They involve credit hogging, social climbing, egomania, insecurity, unethical business behavior and — here comes a Freudian's holiday for anyone who's ever watched the bare-chested young Jagger and Richards vamp it up together — uncertain sexual identity. There's also a cool condescension about Mr. Jagger's contributions to the duo's songwriting. And a nasty nickname or two, like "Disco Boy."

In conversation about all this, Mr. Richards is emphatically blasé: "It's bound to be somewhat rough, but the point is I'm trying to tell the story from Day 1 to now," he says. And sure: "There's the odd conflict here and there. But if you weigh it all out, those things count for nothing." Mr. Richards did see to it that Mr. Jagger knew what was in the book ahead of time. "The important thing to me," he says, "was that Mick had been through it and seen it and knew what was what." And is there anything that one Stone can say about another Stone and really give offense at this point? "No."

But is there anything new that can be said about the Stones anyway? As "Life" emphatically demonstrates, the answer is yes. And some of its most surprisingly revelatory material appears in what Mr. Richards jokingly calls "Keef's Guitar Workshop." Here are the secrets of some of the world's most famous rock riffs and the almost toy-level equipment on which they were recorded, like the cassette recorder onto which Mr. Richards dubbed guitar layer after guitar layer for "Street Fighting Man," "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and part of "Gimme Shelter." Here's how the silent beats in Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" worked their way into some of Mr. Richards's most inspired solos. Mr. Fox found that "Heartbreak Hotel" itself was the key to some of Mr. Richards's best musical memories.

Some of this is by now well known to music critics. But Mr. Richards makes it fascinating at the layman's level. And he is surprised to find that early readers haven't been skipping the musicology, even though the book cordially invites them to do so. What he finds most gratifying about having written "Life" is the chance for both him and his readers to grasp the breadth and range of this book's material. He is the rare memoirist who can say, without hyperbole, "that what I hoped was worth sharing with people turned out to be far more important than I could possibly imagine."

It's getting late. Time to leave this bright orange room where Mr. Richards's name is emblazoned on a director's chair; where assorted music awards and platinum records are everywhere; where there's a discreet little skull in the middle of the wall mirror; where his Louis Vuitton guitar case — he did an ad for Vuitton — is parked in a corner. But the items likeliest to catch his eye are the ones on the coffee table: loose cigarettes neatly arrayed in a holder, a lighter, more cigarettes in a pack.

“Do you mind if I smoke?” he had asked when he first appeared. Easy one: Who, aside from Keith Richards and certain legal authorities, has ever kept Keith Richards from doing anything? But an hour has gone by, and he hasn’t touched the cigarettes. He hasn’t even looked at them. He has done not one thing to make him resemble the sullen, haunted, diabolically beautiful creature on the cover of his book, the one with hellfire blazing up from his hand to meet the blurry white thing he’s smoking.

“That?” he says innocently when asked about the picture. “Oh, that’s just me lighting a cigarette. That’s all I was doing.”