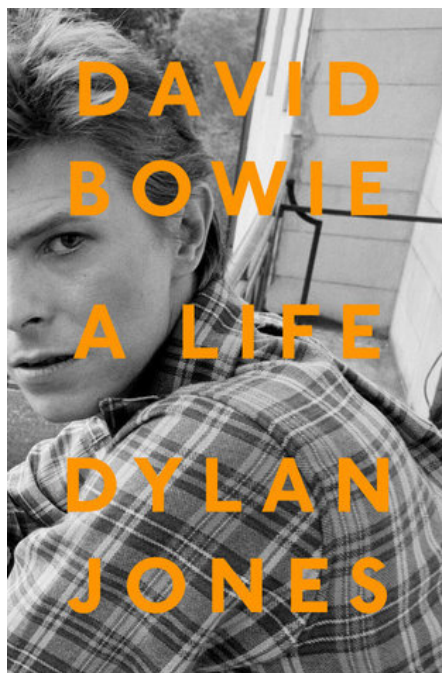




## David Bowie: A Life

*Dylan Jones*

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# David Bowie: A Life

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## David Bowie: A Life Dylan Jones

Dylan Jones's engrossing, magisterial biography of David Bowie is unlike any Bowie story ever written. Drawn from over 180 interviews with friends, rivals, lovers, and collaborators, some of whom have never before spoken about their relationship with Bowie, this oral history weaves a hypnotic spell as it unfolds the story of a remarkable rise to stardom and an unparalleled artistic path. Tracing Bowie's life from the English suburbs to London to New York to Los Angeles, Berlin, and beyond, its collective voices describe a man profoundly shaped by his relationship with his schizophrenic half-brother Terry; an intuitive artist who could absorb influences through intense relationships and yet drop people cold when they were no longer of use; and a social creature equally comfortable partying with John Lennon and dining with Frank Sinatra. By turns insightful and deliciously gossipy, DAVID BOWIE is as intimate a portrait as may ever be drawn. It sparks with admiration and grievances, lust and envy, as the speakers bring you into studios and bedrooms they shared with Bowie, and onto stages and film sets, opening corners of his mind and experience that transform our understanding of both artist and art. Including illuminating, never-before-seen material from Bowie himself, drawn from a series of Jones's interviews with him across two decades, DAVID BOWIE is an epic, unforgettable cocktail-party conversation about a man whose enigmatic shapeshifting and irrepressible creativity produced one of the most sprawling, fascinating lives of our time.

## David Bowie: A Life Details

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## From Reader Review David Bowie: A Life for online ebook

### Valerity (Val) says

DNF--DID NOT FINISH. No Review. I gave up on this one at 17%, just could not keep forcing interest in it and called it quits. This happens on rare occasions. It may be a good book, it just wasn't for me.

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### Tosh says

For a David Bowie lunatic that I'm, it's impossible to put down Dylan Jones' "David Bowie: A Life." First of all, this is an oral biography, meaning there are many voices here talking about a specific subject: Bowie. As a format I love the oral biography because what's interesting is not them exposing their subject matter (Bowie) but how they expose themselves in the telling of the tale. Jones work is really as an editor, and he does a good job here. The inside information is that Bowie is a charmer, but can cut off people once they are not needed, a total professional, he was into sex, and he loved cocaine. The average Bowie fan would know that already, but what we are looking for is a detailed report of such acts and practices. The book serves that purpose quite well. I didn't learn anything, except the rumors that he had a series of strokes in the last decade of his life, at least according to Mick Rock. Which I believe because Bowie in the videos for "The Next Day," he doesn't look entirely well. Also, I have seen photographs of him grasping a book or an object in one hand, which made me think that he may have had a stroke. Still, this is pure gossip, and not any of my business. Which makes me feel a tad guilty reading about his private affairs. The reason I admire him is that of his beauty, his musical genius, and the fact that he's very much an old-fashioned entertainer, who appealed to a new generation of listeners. It's hinted in the book that Frank Sinatra and Fred Astaire admired him as an artist, and I can't think why would they. Bowie is very much in the classic of those two, and what he brings with him is 'culture.' The fact that Bowie read a book a day (and I believe that because I sold him books as a bookseller at a bookstore) and was naturally curious about the world around him. What he did was obtain that information and turned it all into songs and images, under his artistic control. I love Bowie because he's part of the world, and in a way, he gave it a critical look, and instead of writing an essay, he made it into a song. A great artist. Jones' book is really good, but not perfect. Then again, one can take just one Bowie album and make a great oral history book out of it. The way he worked or used musicians is fascinating, and you get that aspect of his working habits within this book. If you're a Bowie fan, there is nothing new here really, but if you are someone who wants to have an enjoyable read on an extraordinary figure in the pop music world, then this book delivers the goods.

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### R. says

This is not a biography, but an oral history, there's almost no interpretation, no intellectualizing, just the anecdotes of the people who knew him, across the entire length of his life. Much of this we already knew, but encountering it compressed together in this way has an effect. I was particularly moved by the glimpses of his friendship with John Lennon, the sense of mutual understanding and affection they had for one another (it made me respect Lennon all the more, knowing that he had found a fellow traveller in Bowie). More generally, the great affection that shines through in almost everyone who knew him suggests a character quite different from the persona "David Bowie." The final pages which deal with his death and the outpouring of grief this produced are hard to read, but important too. The recurring motif is the vast numbers of people who felt that his example gave them permission to take themselves seriously, to value their own experiences and impulses over the demands of the world. I know of only a handful of artists and writers who

have done this, and for the people for whom they have done this, their value far exceeds the "objective" value of the work, however considerable that may be.

For those who know nothing at all about Bowie, I doubt this is the right vehicle. This is more for the people who had followed him all along.

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## Lolly K Dandeneau says

via my blog: <https://bookstalkerblog.wordpress.com/>

"David loved oddities, loved people who were somehow different."

Dylan Jones has written a biography overflowing with insight and stories about David Bowie as told by his friends, lovers, rivals and so on. There was so much I had never known, and I think many of his fans grew up with a different Bowie. Growing up an 80's kid, he will always be my Goblin King, Jareth. The only problem with writing about a person through collective thoughts and memories is you can lose the person. It steals the romance and the mystery of a celebrity. On the other hand, you sort of feel like you're in a room with a bunch of people gossiping behind his back, or gushing about him, it is all very dizzying. I'd known nothing about his family, his upbringing and this book delves deep into all of that- and particularly David's interest in his brother Terry, who had schizophrenia. David, I think, was someone who was always something 'other', beyond charm, beyond individuality- and it's evident through every story on these pages. The rivalry between Jagger and Bowie was a bit fun to read, particularly why David Jones decided to become David Bowie, maybe this healthy competition helped keep their stars shining for their fans.

From an early age, it seems everything influenced Bowie- from the books he read to fashion, american culture, jazz, and the beats, it all comes together and explains what nurtured such an amazing artist. His brother's 'madness' seems to have been channeled through David, in his work. One wonders how much his brother had an effect the Bowie transformations through the ages. But you can't think you understand that aspect of a person's life, simply from stories or interviews. I felt protective of Terry and David reading what happened.

In all honesty, I most enjoyed reading all of David's words, not everyone else's. I can imagine he lit up a room, was his 'most beautiful' just around people, not just bursting with brilliance on stage. What you come away with is his genius, but also that he controlled what you are allowed to see and it should be kept that way. There is a lot of insight from people very close to Bowie and those on the periphery, the reader treks through so much information, as so many of the people who crossed paths with David get their say. I think David Bowie, even with his humor and charm, was a lot more serious than fans realized. No one says it better than Iman, his wife "I fell in love with David Jones, I did not fall in love with David Bowie." I think the world needs to keep Bowie and let his loved ones keep David Jones. Bowie was a beautiful creation by a hell of an intelligently talented man. I don't think you can understand a person through everyone surrounding him, it's too distorted because just when you think you have a grasp of who he was, another story contradicts it. Bowie remains a mist you just can't hold. This book will feed his fans, because it covers many decades and you can get the feel that you were along for a bit of the wild ride. It's Bowie in other's eyes. I cringe a bit, wondering how mangled I would be if people I brushed shoulders with, alongside those who knew me best painted a picture of who I was when I am gone. What sort of Frankenstein's monster would be created? In itself, it would just be another 'creation' not capturing the reality. This novel comes close to the real David with intimacy but then pushes you away, but isn't that the celebrity way?

There are many facts, it's a hell of a collection but I hunger for Bowie in his own words. He lived in his own world, the rest of us were just visiting.

Publication Date: October 3, 2017

Crown Publishing

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## **Claire (bookcoffeeandrepeat) says**

This book is for those who have read countless of Bowie biographies. If you're a newly converted David Bowie fan (just like me), then I wouldn't recommend this book. Simply because this isn't just about David Bowie. It's also about everyone else who contributed to this weird version of a biography. You're not just reading about Bowie himself, you also get a glimpse of other people who worked with Bowie. Simply put: this book has a weird format because it doesn't look like a biography to me. To me, it looked like a collection of stories coming from different people who had encounters with David Bowie (even if it was brief).

The writing is kind of dry and it was difficult to hold my attention (sometimes). I had to DNF or skip some stories. Even if I did jump from story to story, this book was still an interesting read. I mean, who knew David Bowie asked Courtney Love to turn down the volume when she was listening to Fleetwood Mac at 9am? Little stories such as this one makes the book a worthwhile read. Unfortunately, the only picture of Bowie is on the cover. I wish there had been more photographs somewhere inside the book.

**I received this book from *Blogging for Books* for this review. All thoughts are my own.** And for this review (and more), check out my book blog.

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## **\*TUDOR^QUEEN\* says**

The music of David Bowie is something I've held in mild regard over the decades. I had an 8-track of "Young Americans" back in the seventies and who doesn't love Space Oddity?!! I also remember enjoying the strains of "Modern Love" and "Let's Dance" in the 80's. I own a "Greatest Hits" CD of Bowie and that is the extent of his importance in my life (I'm primarily a major Beatles fan). However, this biography of David Bowie in its oral history format has affected me so much that I am prompted to read his other biographies as well as delve into the treasure trove of his music library.

I was skeptical about whether I would like the oral history format of this offering, but this actually connected with me far more than I think the standard biography would. This was a mammoth book of over 500 pages (no pictures) comprised of Bowie memories served up by friends, band members, business colleagues, wives, lovers, etc...to tell the life story of Bowie. Nothing is more genuine than the direct words of the people who knew and loved Bowie. These are just a handful of some of the people who added their recollections to this oral history:

Tony Visconti (producer of many of Bowie's albums)  
Angela Bowie (first wife)  
Iman (second wife)  
Bono (U2 singer)  
Kate Moss (model)  
Paul McCartney (former Beatle and music legend)  
Peter Frampton (childhood classmate and fellow musician)

I feel like I have been reading and enjoying this for a very long time as because of its oral history format, I felt comfortable bouncing in and out of this book to read other books when needed or desired. It begins with his youth in Bromley, England and transitions to his marriage to Angie and the birth of their son as he cannily transforms into his alter ego of Ziggy Stardust. There were many lovers along the way, but as the book nears its close, he finds perfect love and happiness with his second wife Iman. It was very poignant reading the passages in reaction to Bowie's death, and how he strove to complete his final album "Blackstar" as a parting gift.

I came away from this book in awe of Bowie's high intellect, capacity for friendship/kindness, fearless sense of adventure, and strength. He was certainly a multifaceted talent and extraordinary human being. Although I still have all those other Bowie biographies to read, something tells me that I may just have already read the best one!

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### **Edward Lorn says**

Repetitive and boring. One of the worst-written biographies I've had the displeasure to read.

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### **F.R. says**

I'm a big Bowie fan, with the records, the T-shirts and a seeming desire to watch every documentary ever made about the man and his work. The first Christmas present my now wife ever bought me was tickets to the V&A exhibition, while for a long time I sang STARMAN every day to my tiny baby daughter. It's a long story, but even at four weeks old I knew that she loved it too. As such I'm not quite impartial when it comes to this book. Indeed, I'm incredibly bias towards liking it.

For a Bowie fan, this oral history is a fantastically deep and immersive experience. Hearing the thoughts and recollections of Bowie himself, as well as those who knew him and sometimes even fans, it's his story from his childhood right through to his too early death. Probably there are other books that are better for the man's music, but it is a truly comprehensive guide to his life.

But as much as I enjoyed it, as much as I raced through it, there are undoubted flaws. His family for instance, remain distant figures within the text. Yes, we do hear a lot about his late brother who hangs like Banquo's ghost over him, but his parents remain forever distant. Mentioned frequently, but unknown. Perhaps for his mother that's understandable as she does seem an emotionally cold presence in her son's life, but his dad is both portrayed as someone he was close to and – curiously – someone he wasn't. (To quote some song or other, it's confusing sometimes.) Undoubtedly, it's more a problem with the form than anything else: as people's memories and perceptions differ, and an oral history can't help but reflect that. But it does make for a frustrating read.

(It's a much more minor point: but his relationship with Paul McCartney seems to throughout the book go from lows to highs without any understanding as to why and how. It's the tiniest of sub-plots I know, I don't think thumb waving Macca and The Thin White Duke were natural musical bedfellows, but I found myself tantalised nonetheless)

Much like Bowie himself, it's a book that's sometimes pretentious, but more often than not is willing to puncture its own pomposity. It reveals a man who is intellectually curious, open to new ideas and generous

with those he loved. It also conjures up a man who was capricious, bitchy, easily tired of the people around him and at times quite unpleasant. Even if it's author clearly adores the man, it's far from a hagiography.

I'm a Bowie fan of old and absolutely adored it. To be fair the only people likely to read this are Bowie fans too and I think you'll adore it also.

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### **\*Avonna says**

Check out all of my reviews at: <http://www.avonnalovesgenres.com>

DAVID BOWIE: A LIFE by Dylan Jones is classified as a biography, but it is not written in the traditional style. The entire life of David Bowie is laid out chronologically, but told in more of an oral history style by people who have been involved in or impacted by Bowie's life either for a short time or many years.

This book clearly shows that David Bowie was the artist and innovator, while David Jones was the charismatic and flawed human. David Jones was influenced by his schizophrenic older brother and learned at a young age how mental illness can effect a family. He escaped the suburbs of London to live a life of continual self-reinvention, absorption of ideas and a lifelong love of learning and world travel.

The many voices that tell of his life are what make this book different. There are friends who were with him for many years and give their views of what David meant to their lives and careers and there are those voices that feel that they were used for a short time and then discarded. All say that David could turn on his charisma at will and make you feel the center of his world, but he could also cut you to the quick if he was done with you.

The author does not shy away from the sex and drugs of the 60's and 70's that were pervasive in the rock and roll culture, but he has people on both sides tell of the abuses and how they perceived them and how some were able to conquer them. It is told in a non-judgmental way. There are personal and professional stories of love for Bowie as well as jealousies. I do wish there were more passages by Bowie himself, but I really believe this book is like his life, it is all about what you experienced and what you personally took away from his music and art.

On a personal note: I saw David Bowie perform on his "Serious Moonlight" tour when he came to the Richfield Coliseum for my birthday many years ago. It was an amazing show with the most charismatic singer I have ever seen in concert. I have followed him through every incarnation and have always loved his voice, lyrics, fashion and smile.

Thanks very much to Crown Publishing and Net Galley for allowing me to read this eARC in exchange for and honest review.

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### **Gregory Butera says**

This book needed a better editor. It was bloated and should have been trimmed severely. Not every bit and story needed to be included. Some anecdotes seemed completely irrelevant and didn't connect to anything said before or after. They should have been cut. Some anecdotes contradicted one another, sometimes on the same page, without any acknowledgement from the author. And he had plenty of his own to say. He wrote of

his experience often enough that he should have tagged his sections with his name like the others rather than rely on using italics. It was disjointed and distracting. So clearly this was rushed to press to capitalize on the window of nostalgia following the death of a great 70s rocker. If you can get beyond all those gripes there is some wonderful stuff in this book, with stories about the making of albums, songs, relationships, and the many personae that make up the entity we know as David Bowie.

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## Peter says

Poorly edited (unedited?), featuring the worthless opinions of basement bloggers, missing so many vital voices, and yet any even the biggest Bowie-addict is likely to learn something new about the extraterrestrial messiah.

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## Dave says

Dylan Jones has presented us with an insightful documentary of David Bowie's life. What sets this book apart from other rock biographies is the format. Rather than proceeding in an expository fashion, Jones tells Bowie's story through snippets of interviews with people who knew him, played with him, grew up with him, dated him, and did business with him. It's a technique used in television documentaries with people who are essentially life witnesses sitting around and musing about someone they once knew. You don't hear the interviewer's queries - just the subject's narratives. As you read through this book which is told in snippets chronologically you can hear these voices literally as if they were all sitting around in a pub, kicking back, and reminiscing. The flip side to this, of course, is that hearing all these narratives starting and stopping makes the book feel quite lengthy.

While I would disagree with the premise that Bowie's death was a monumental shock to the Music community - the man had lived a full life by then —, his was a singular creative voice always on the edge and I will always remember Bowie closing out the Us Festival 2 in the wasteland of Devore, California.

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## J. says

1975

*This was his dark year. Everyone in L.A. did coke at the time but he did more than most. He did more than anyone. David went into the kitchen and got all the sharp steak knives and the butcher knives, and he hid them. When I came down in the morning I said where are all the knives? And he said it's just in case the Manson family—who by now were all in jail—came to get him.*

*He was ninety-five pounds, and he was doing mass quantities of cocaine. I would say we were probably both doing seven grams a day. And that is a lot of cocaine to snort. And we had an endless supply of cocaine. Knowing now what I know about cocaine, one of us should have died... David and I were toxic. Cocaine is the devil's drug. There was a moment when we were getting high, and David started to bleed from his eye, actually bleeding. It was getting really bad, and then he went off to Mexico to shoot *The Man Who Fell To Earth*. .. Glenn Hughes, friend*

Rather than the ultimately tedious guessing game that most biographies have to play, Dylan Jones' book opens up a pandora's box of possibilities. Biography is often comprised of dubious, oft-repeated guesswork about a celebrity subject, a famous artist. Instead, proposes the author, how about other celebrities and artists



telling a dizzying array of tall tales--- about your central subject?

Glastonbury 1971.

*I think the big attraction on the night he was due to play was Traffic, and things inevitably went off-schedule, so he got shunted off the Pyramid Stage. Everyone crashed out after Traffic but then as dawn broke people started running around, waking you up, saying you've got to come and listen to this amazing guy, as David had just started his set. He was in full Hunky Dory mode—long hair, a dress, and just his guitar, playing the dawn chorus. It was a breathtaking performance, quite spectral, and you realized immediately just how powerful all this creativity was... .. Julien Temple, film director*

This approach pales a bit in the early going but the further you go, the more you realize that this is closer to a documentary film than the purely imagined bios we're used to. Verbatim testimony by notoriously untrustworthy sources, what could be better.

*What makes 1972 special goes beyond folk memories of a glorious summer lived out to the sound of a then-hip Rod Stewart singing 'You Wear It Well'... What makes that year special is that it marked a borderline between the Sixties—the years of affluence, experiment, sex and drugs, and hippie idealism, and, yes, flaky politics—and the real Seventies, the years of inflation, unemployment, changing attitudes to gender and sexuality, radicalisation .. .. David Lister, The Independent*

Even so, the occasional interjection from the author comes less as intrusion and more as the voice-over guiding the viewer through the documentary:

*1972 London was like the Bakerloo Line—all brown and Bakelite and dark even when lit. Decimalization, which was meant to hint at the white heat of modernization, had only encouraged Londoners to think that they were all slightly worse off than they'd been before it was introduced, the previous year. It wouldn't be enough to say that every day in London in the early '70s was like Sunday; specifically they were like any Sunday in November between the hours of four and five o'clock in the afternoon. It is almost as if the country had been brushed with a charcoal wash.*

*This is the world that Ziggy Stardust landed in, beamed down to a sullen, punitive, disgruntled gray country, a so-called Great Britain that hadn't been Great for some time, full of sullen, disgruntled people who by rights shouldn't have taken too kindly to a pipe-cleaner-thin pop singer dressed up as a gay alien in a quilted jumpsuit. But take to him is exactly what they did. ..Author.*

Unlike, say, the Kinks or the Stones, by the time Bowie hit the world circuit, there was a well established, uhm, tradition of excess, you might call it. Rock touring was performance art, onstage and especially off. If you're familiar with the Bowie story, this is probably the best next book about the man, as told in numerous, shape-shifting and unreliable ways, by those who passed along the same path. All very jolly, for awhile.

*I was a nymphomaniac at the time, and I suppose Bowie was a sex addict. He just had a good time. He may have intellectualized it, but it was really just sex. Lots of sex. You have to remember we were living through a sexual revolution. To me it seemed natural to have as much sex as possible. We didn't go to gyms, so dancing and sex were our exercise. You could fuck your fat off. Sex was an act of rebellion at the time—fuck the Church, fuck the Establishment. Let's fuck. .. Cherry Vanilla, publicist*

Every celebrity has his surreal moments, but it must be presupposed that when your touring lounge act was a Cabaret and Clockwork inspired evening of chanson and throbbing electric transgression, fronted by an androgynous skeletal Piaf-- the after-hours parties were going to be a bit stranger than average. The dystopian & otherworldly occasionally turned up at Bowie's door, unannounced and unwanted.

*1972 Benjamin Franklin Hotel. Something weird happened later that night in Philadelphia. Something really chilling. At one point there was a knock on the door, and, after a while, one of his bodyguards went to*

*answer it, and then called for David. So David went off and came back a few minutes later white as a sheet. He was visibly shocked. Someone had just turned up and offered him a warm, dead body for David to have sex with. The town had never seen anything like David before, and he obviously looked like such a freak that some sick people thought he might be into necrophilia. That was the perception of Ziggy, and that's how crazy that tour was, that's how decadent it was. David was completely horrified. He said, "Who on earth do they think I am? Why would they think I'd be interested in something like that? Why would I be interested in fucking a dead body?" It took him a while to calm down, but once it was over, he just moved right past it. ..* Josette Caruso, friend

Like everything else in the Bowiverse, the subject himself has thought of this "verbatim-not-verified" sort of idea-- first. Inaccuracy never kept Bowie away; in actual fact, he treated it as a kind of signature-- the double-meaning, the mirror-image, the reimagined.

*2006 My past doesn't belong to anyone but me, although I am obviously respectful of people's relationship with it. I'm not much interested in my own mythology. It feels quite fabulous when you watch Mtv and realized that someone is doing "me", but I don't want to go back myself, and I don't want to trawl through the archives. But I must admit I like reading about myself, and I even read my ex-wife's book. It's terrifying! The first time I ever read one, I didn't know whether to be angry or mystified, as there were so many inaccuracies. But as subsequent books kept coming out with all their own interpretations, I thought I'd quite like to put one out which incorporates all the inaccuracies, making this kind of truly fantastic creation. It could be my autobiography. ..* David Bowie

Another crash course for the ravers. Return, relive, regret. Recommended.

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## Scott Rhee says

Dylan Jones, the editor of the British edition of GQ magazine, published "David Bowie: A Life" in 2017, a year after Bowie's death in January 2016. As someone who has read several biographies, critical analyses, philosophical ramblings, and uncategorizable miscellanea about Bowie (and there is a shockingly huge amount of material out there on the subject), I was, perhaps, not expecting much. At least, not much in the sense of *much more* than I've already studied, learned, and appreciated about Bowie.

Fortunately, Jones has done something rather clever and excellent. Rather than write a straight biography about Bowie in which Jones, the biographer, editorializes and comments and attempts to dissect the subject, he has written an oral biography in which he lets dozens of Bowie's childhood friends, relatives, bandmates, former lovers, managers, publicists, limo drivers, critics, fans, haters, and contemporaries do it for him.

Jones apparently interviewed 182 people for this book. He also drew from seven in-depth interviews with Bowie over the years, along with many other well-known interviews. He simply lets people speak, with some (although surprisingly little) of his own editorializing. While this may sound like one of those videos that your cousin makes at your wedding, in which they get everyone to say a few words about how they know you and what they love about you, the resultant book is actually incredibly profound, immensely readable, and beautifully moving.

It's also perfectly appropriate for an icon like Bowie, a man who was, still is, and probably will forever be an enigma. Therein lies the joy and excitement of Jones's book.

For every piece of well-known history about Bowie's amazing life, there is, I'm sure, for many other fans, something in this book that will be new, shocking, and eye-opening about the man that we honestly didn't think could shock or surprise us any more.

There is also so much more than that, though. Jones clearly loved and respected Bowie the man as well as the musician and the celebrity, enough to know that he was far from perfect. Bowie, like everyone, had dark sides to his character. He had skeletons in his closet, some of which we have some clues about, others we may never know. He was, after all, a human being, despite his life-long partly-tongue-in-cheek, partly-serious attempt to cultivate a persona of an otherworldly type, a permanent outsider, the Alien/Starman.

As a life-long Bowie fan, I can honestly say that my love for the man extends beyond just the music and liner notes; my love for Bowie encompasses everything about him: foibles, dark sides, and imperfections included.

“David Bowie: A Life” is an absolute must-read for any Bowieophile.

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### **Kimley says**

A rather gossipy, salacious take on Bowie's life. This is more about the sex and drugs than the rock 'n' roll but nevertheless an essential read for the Bowie fanatic.

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