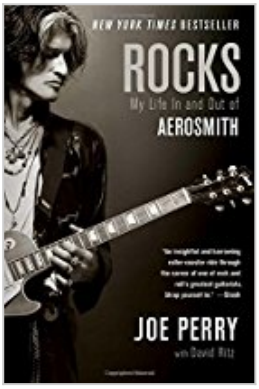

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Rocks: My Life in and out of Aerosmith

By Joe Perry

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Rocks: My Life in and out of Aerosmith By Joe Perry

Joe Perry's *New York Times* bestselling memoir of life in the rock-and-roll band Aerosmith: "An insightful and harrowing roller coaster ride through the career of one of rock and roll's greatest guitarists. Strap yourself in" (Slash).

Before the platinum records or the Super Bowl half-time show or the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Joe Perry was a boy growing up in small-town Massachusetts. He idolized Jacques Cousteau and built his own diving rig that he used to explore a local lake. He dreamed of becoming a marine biologist. But Perry's neighbors had teenage sons, and those sons had electric guitars, and the noise he heard when they started playing would change his life.

The guitar became his passion, an object of lust, an outlet for his restlessness and his rebellious soul. That passion quickly blossomed into an obsession, and he got a band together. One night after a performance he met a brash young musician named Steven Tyler; before long, Aerosmith was born. What happened over the next forty-five years has become the stuff of legend: the knockdown, drag-out, band-splintering fights; the drugs, the booze, the rehab; the packed arenas and timeless hits; the reconciliations and the comebacks.

Rocks is an unusually searching memoir of a life that spans from the top of the world to the bottom of the barrel—several times. It is a study of endurance and brotherhood, with Perry providing remarkable candor about Tyler, as well as new insights into their powerful but troubled relationship. It is an insider's portrait of the rock and roll family, featuring everyone from Jimmy Page to Alice Cooper, Bette Midler to Chuck Berry, John Belushi to Al Hirschfeld. It takes us behind the scenes at unbelievable moments such as Joe and Steven's appearance in the movie of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (they act out the murders of Peter Frampton and the Bee Gees).

Full of humor, insight, and brutal honesty about life in and out of one of the biggest bands in the world, *Rocks* is "well-paced, well-plotted…a mini-masterpiece" (*The Boston Globe*).

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Rocks: My Life in and out of Aerosmith By Joe Perry Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #667847 in Books
- Brand: SIMON SCHUSTER
- Published on: 2015-10-20
- Released on: 2015-10-20
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 1.20" w x 6.12" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 432 pages

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Editorial Review

Review
“A mini-masterpiece . . . Just as the preeminent Stones book was an autobiography from its guitarist, Aerosmith ax man Joe Perry has now given us the best book on [Aerosmith]. . . . The meat of the book proves to be the relationship between Perry and frontman Steven Tyler, a rock ’n’ roll partnership with all of the carnage, love, backbiting, separations, and reunions you’d expect. Perry’s anecdotes could have been flown in from some acerock ’n’ roll-centric novel, and do more than amuse; the best enlighten, notjust about this band and the partnership at the core of it, but the very natureof creativity itself.” ***—The Boston Globe***

“An excellent read . . . There are times when Perry’s descriptions of Tyler’s interactions with himself and others are laced with near-hatred and disgust . . . but there are also the moments when you realize that if Shakespeare had ever written a play about rock ’n’ roll blood brothers, the two male leads would’ve been Joe Perry and Steven Tyler.” ***—Guitar World***

“Thrilling . . . An intimate narrative . . . This is the raw Aerosmith . . . Perry discusses every detail of the creative process . . .[and] takes you through every developmental stage of his journey in becoming the guitar legend he is today.” ***—Rebeat*** **magazine**

“A story of friendship and love. Since the Aerosmith chronicles have already been brought to vivid life in the band’s *Walk This Way*, it left Perry room to contemplate things from a deeper core inside of himself. . . . What *Rocks* gives to his fans is a rare look into thepsyche of a man who always heard the music and let the music do the talking.” ***—Glide*** **magazine**

“Riveting . . . Eye-opening . . . An engaging read.” ***—The Patriot Ledger***

“An insightful and harrowing roller coaster ride through the career of one of rock and roll’s greatest guitarists. Strap yourself in.” **—Slash**

“Rocking Joe Perry ‘rocks’ again!” **—Jimmy Page**

“Joe Perry has been the AxeMeister longer than some of you have been alive. He’s been there, and done that. He has been the consummate six-string gunslinger for a band that has always done things their own way. Joe never went Hollywood. Joe never looked over his shoulder to see who was running behind him. Ever the gentleman rocker, Joe sits high atop of rock royalty. Admit it. You’re jealous. When I grow up, I want to be Joe Perry.” **—Gene Simmons**

"One might guess that I, Perry Farrell, would admire Joe Perry because he is a legendary guitar ripper, and you'd easily be right on the button—however, what you wouldn't have guessed is that I admire, respect, and have looked up to Joe Perry for years because he is a mad passionate, devoted husband and loving daddy who rocks. Viva familia Joe!" **—Perry Farrell**

“Evocative . . . Perry’s book will strike gold with every Aerosmith fan.” ***—Publishers Weekly***

“Joe Perry describes with amazing detail and passion the virtual odyssey of his life as the quintessential rock star in America’s most famous rock band of all time. Like his riffs, his story is inspired, crisp, and packs a punch. Joe Perry has done for rock and roll what the human genome project and stem cell technology have

done for medicine—broken it wide open to inspire and shape our music for many decades to come. I could not stop reading this book!" **—Rudolph Tanzi, professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School and *New York Times* bestselling coauthor (with Deepak Chopra) of *Super Brain***

About the Author
Lead guitarist Joe Perry and singer Steven Tyler wrote the majority of the songs that form the backbone of Aerosmith's catalogue. In 2013, they were inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

David Ritz is the only four-time winner of the Gleason Music Book Award.

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Rocks

THE WATER AND THE WOODS

In the essential dream of my childhood I'm in the water or the woods. I'm swimming through an ocean of startling clarity. I'm seeing a thousand varieties of fish; I'm feeling like a fish myself, aware that at any moment a bigger fish might swim my way—a shark or a barracuda. The thought is more exhilarating than frightening. I'm not scared of the possibility of danger. I almost welcome the encounter. I welcome surprise. Nature is nothing but surprise, a world of water whose vastness allows me to disappear into pure beauty.

The lure of the woods is its primitive beauty. My dream life in the woods has me lost in a grove of ancient trees. If I keep walking long enough I'll find my way out, but I'm not sure I want out. Being lost in the wilds has a certain comfort. There is no destination, no home. I don't know what's around the bend—a wolf, a wildcat, a venomous snake. I like not knowing. I like the dense undergrowth, the sharp smells of the forest, the songs of the birds, the ever-changing weather, the dark clouds, the quickening of my heartbeat as I suddenly realize that I and I alone am responsible for my survival. For the rest of my life I will stare into the unknown.

In the water and the woods I face danger and discovery. In my real life, as a boy born on September 10, 1950, and raised in the small, quiet town of Hopedale, Massachusetts, I keep going back to the water and the woods. That's where I seek anonymity. It's where I can disappear into wordless, endless wonder.

I'm not saying that I'm able to completely disappear from the emotional ups and downs that characterize every childhood. I'm saying that I want to. My earliest memories all involve being drawn deep into nature, where I welcome, rather than fear, getting lost. I welcome the mysteries that lurk at the bottom of the sea and live inside the dark forest of night.

My parents were good and honorable people. They cared for their two children—my younger sister, Anne, and myself—with loving concern. My mother, Mary, was a graduate of Boston University with a master's degree. She taught physical education in the public schools. Her mind was both curious and brilliant. She was always reading about everything from the earth's chakras to the metaphysics of quantum theory to John Steinbeck's Travels with Charley. She wore her hair short and exuded great confidence. As a strong and proud working mom of the 1950s, she was a woman of the future—a liberated woman decades before the movement began.

My father, Tony, was equally upstanding. He had gone to Kent State and graduated from Boston's Northeastern University with a major in accounting. He had grown up in Lowell, Massachusetts, where his

dad, a Portuguese immigrant from the island of Madeira off the coast of Morocco, worked in the factories and later owned a funky little grocery store. My dad was born in Lowell and when he was two the family moved back to Madeira where my dad spent his childhood before moving back to the States. After serving in the U.S. Army Air Forces at the end of World War II, Dad graduated from college and began working as an accountant, taking his first steps toward self-reinvention. The family name—Pereira—was shortened to Perry by his father. And rather than stay in Lowell, Dad moved to Hopedale, some thirty miles outside Boston, where the American dream had been set out in the form of suburban perfection. Hopedale was where my father entered the upper middle class.

Founded in 1842, Hopedale was one of the country's first utopian communities. It began as a picture-perfect Norman Rockwell village of industrious dreams. In the 1850s the Draper Corporation, manufacturer of power looms for the textile industry, took over the town. In the 1950s my dad went to work for Draper as a cost accountant. He and Mom bought a duplex in Bancroft Park and rented out the other side.

Mom's parents, the Ursillos, hailed from Naples, Italy, and would have loved to see their daughter enter a nunnery. She rejected most of their old-world notions about womanhood, but she accepted their Catholicism—at least to the point of attending Sunday mass and making sure that her husband and children did the same.

In our household there were few if any remnants of my parents' Italian and Portuguese backgrounds. Only English was spoken. No philosophy but American pragmatism was practiced. Do what works. Adapt to reality. Improve your circumstances by applying yourself. I was raised inside the solid ethos of the Eisenhower 1950s. My mother's child-raising bible was Dr. Spock's Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care. The Perrys were all about common sense. Mom taught generations of children the benefits of exercise. Because of his common sense and sterling reputation, Dad was elected town treasurer. Mary and Tony were a well-respected couple. At home, they spoke to one another fondly. They were affectionate; they hugged; they kissed; they were girlfriend and boyfriend. Together, they comprised a formidable tennis doubles team.

I see them in their whites, out on the court during a fine New England afternoon in May, whacking the ball with studied determination. I am not part of their game but, standing close by, I feel their confidence.

I see them flying high in the cloudless sky in a seaplane that my father is piloting. I am not with them, but from the ground below, I feel their exhilaration as Dad buzzes the local baseball field to get a look at the score. The town officials chastise him for flying too low. He's contrite but I know he doesn't regret his joyride. Straitlaced accountants don't break laws, even minor ones, but I'm glad to see that my dad, whose laces are always supertight, has some sense of rebellion.

He was the first guy in Hopedale to buy a Volkswagen Bug. Later he bought a BMW before anyone had heard of BMWs. The color, I remember well, was bright orange.

I also remember Dad talking about his buddies and World War II like it had just ended. He told stories about being a waist gunner on a B-17, the heavy-duty bomber, during the last months of the war. I pictured him standing at an open window on the side of a plane tearing through the sky at two hundred miles an hour, thirty-two thousand feet above the ground. The wind's coming at an outside temperature of -32°. Dad's face is covered by an oxygen mask and his chest protected only by a sheepskin jacket as he fires away at enemy aircraft. He realizes that such missions end with a 40 to 50 percent fatality rate. Yet he does what he has to do, a nineteen-year-old with balls of steel.

As a little boy, I would study a tattered black-and-white photo of his crew, amazed that my dad was once so young. He and his fellow soldiers looked into the camera with easy gazes. There was no fear in their eyes. They seemed relaxed about their mission, which, day after day, brought them to death's door.

I saw my father as a man of quiet courage. His goal for his family was simple—a better life. Postwar America was all about optimism and economic mobility. The war had been won and prosperity was at hand. But prosperity had to be earned through skills forged in discipline. It took discipline to become a professional accountant. It took hard work for a woman in the 1940s to graduate from college. My parents lived disciplined lives. They were neither doting nor overly affectionate with their children, but they were dutiful and always present. Dinner was served on time. Bills were paid on time. We didn't live beyond our means. We didn't live on borrowed money. Education was valued. Education was seen as the key to greater prosperity.

My education became the first and greatest stumbling block, another reason why I longed to lose myself in the water and the woods. Like millions of other kids, I had a learning disability—attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)—that was neither understood nor treated. Reading was the only subject at which I excelled. I would much rather be reading James Fenimore Cooper than dealing with participles in French.

My poor school performance was puzzling because my parents saw that I possessed intelligence and curiosity. Marine biology became a passion. When I asked them to drive me to Boston to hear lectures by Jacques Cousteau, my first hero, they were happy to do so. They took me to the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution on Cape Cod, a paradise for a kid in love with water. I was obsessed with learning from those men who explored the deep. I wanted to go deep. I was told that if I kept up my grades I could come back one summer and intern at Woods Hole.

That never happened.

My grades were below average. That became the great mystery of my childhood: Why was I having such difficulty at school? I was deeply frustrated. I wanted to present my parents with good grades. I sensed their ambition for themselves and for me—and I wanted to realize those ambitions. I wanted to please them. The fact that I scored high on IQ tests only made things worse. I didn't understand why I wasn't doing better, and neither did they. They hired tutors but the tutors didn't help. I read things three or four times without retaining a word. I was always told to try and focus, but that never worked. At school, I felt like I was living under a cloud.

That cloud extended to another area of my childhood: my dad's health. The chronology is vague and the memories blurred, but the specter of cancer entered my childhood at an early date. Somewhere in my young years my father went to the hospital. He was gone for an extended time. The man who returned had a dark beard, and I didn't recognize him. When I realized the stranger was my father, I burst into tears. The ugly scar across his back where they had reached in to remove his cancerous kidney frightened me even more.

Relief from my own struggles at school came from a dreamlike body of water set inside the woodsy landscape of western New Hampshire. Three hours north of Hopedale, Sunapee is a pure glacial lake, a natural wonder of luminous clarity and pristine beauty. The first time I faced the lake, my heart sang. I was a quiet kid, often shy, and not given to outward bursts of enthusiasm. But Lake Sunapee broke down my reserve and had me jumping for joy. To my young eyes, it was an undiscovered world to enter and explore. From the outside it was magnificent, but from the inside—diving under and skiing over its mountain-clear waters—it became even more miraculous. Sunapee became a refuge, a friend, a different and exciting second

home, a place that turned my mundane world magical. Its magic turned my life around. Even now, writing from afar, I long to see it sparkling under the summer sun or frozen solid under a white winter moon. Eight miles long and a couple of miles wide, the lake is dotted with eight islands and a shoreline that extends some seventy miles. There are small peninsulas and little lake fingers and sandy beaches wherever you look. The outlying forest is dense with vegetation and animal life. On a night in fall, breathing in the crisp, cool air, you look up into a sky crowded with a hundred thousand stars. In the morning, with the rising sun, you see a hundred thousand trees whose leaves are shimmering gold.

Coming to Sunapee as a child, I fell deeply and permanently in love. My love for the water and the woods never diminished. Later in life, I moved away, but I kept coming back. I couldn't stay away from the place where, for the first and only time, everything made sense. Everything was right—the sky, the lake, the forest, the sense of calm, the feeling of natural order.

My parents began talking about buying lakefront property to build a cabin. They proceeded with the usual Perry MO: Save until the money is there; do not buy on credit; do not live above your means. After carefully surveying the region, they chose a prime piece of property—it featured a hundred feet of lake frontage, in an undeveloped area. It provided one of the best views on the lake. A foundation was poured. A shell was built. Because my grandfather also did some building, my dad used his tools to do a lot of the work himself. My parents were young and athletic and skilled at manual labor. My mom did the painting. It became a family project, and within a year or two we were living in the cabin. Because there was no water or heat, it served us only during the warm months. We closed it up during winter. But eventually we winterized it—a complicated operation that required running a pipe thirty feet out to the lake. The pipe had to be buried four feet down, below the frost line. I helped Dad dig the ditch with a pick and shovel, a job I usually hated, but I loved this one. I loved anything that would enable us to spend more time at Sunapee and work alongside my dad.

As a resort area, Lake Sunapee had a rich history. There had been many ups and downs. When I was old enough to hang out, I saw the remnants of the forties and fifties. Those were the old hotels that were bustling during and just after World War II—the days when Benny Goodman's and Glenn Miller's big bands stopped off to play on their way from New York to Montreal. When I was a kid, those same resorts, in various stages of decay, were still around. There was a decrepit theater, an old skating rink, a variety of old buildings rotting away. At the same time, there was a feeling of excitement from a new generation of kids who hung out at the harbor. The hot spot was an ice cream parlor/burger joint packed wall-to-wall with teenagers, their hot rods parked outside. Some old-money kids cruised up in their parents' classic Chris-Craft speedboats. The yacht club was still up and running and a focal point for Sunapee's high society.

My mother, an instructor for the Red Cross, taught me to swim. I took to it immediately. It makes sense that water meant security, because Mom taught water safety and had certified most of the kids in our cove as open-water swimmers.

Water-ski shows in the harbor attracted big crowds. In trying to imitate the fancy tricks, most times I'd wind up on my ass with a nose full of water, but I would keep trying until I mastered it. I was able to pull off most every trick in the water-ski manual—from two skis to one ski to no skis at all. Driving the boat as her son tried mastering these tricks, my mother demonstrated limitless patience. I saw water as the source of endless amusement. And then came that dark day when water became linked with death.

Friends and I were watching a water-ski show filled with the kind of danger and daring that I loved. It was a weekend when my relatives had come to the lake for a family barbecue. The proceedings were interrupted by a loudspeaker announcement: "There has been an accident. A doctor is needed. Will a doctor please come to

the dock immediately?" I didn't think much of it. No one in the show had suffered a fall. The accident must have happened somewhere else on the lake. After the show had ended, my sister and I went back to our cabin, where we saw a police car in our driveway. The atmosphere was quiet, cold. A crowd of people was down by the waterfront talking to my family—my parents plus cousins, aunts, and uncles. Dad quickly took Anne and me aside.

"Kids," he said, "something awful has happened."

I didn't want to ask. I didn't want to know. I stayed silent.

"Your grandfather had an accident. He fell from his boat. We're afraid he's drowned."

I remember asking the ridiculous question "Is he all right?" and feeling stupid afterward. But the words had come out and I couldn't take them back.

"I'm afraid not," said Dad with what felt like emotional detachment, a quality I inherited from him. "We can't find your grandfather. He's gone."

I wanted to ask where he had gone, but I knew. Gone meant dead. Drowned meant dead. Later I heard how, in spite of the rough water, my grandfather had insisted on going fishing in a canoe. Someone said he'd been drinking. Patrol boats went looking for him. It was two weeks before his body turned up.

For the first time I faced the fact that a person can be here one minute and gone the next. My dad's dad was a strong presence, a man who did nothing to hide his immigrant demeanor. He wore big black work boots, heavy jackets, and frayed shirts. He spoke with a thick accent. The father of eleven children, he lived the life of a workman. As I got older, I heard stories about how he was actually an alcoholic who could turn violent against his wife and kids.

Yet the water in which he drowned continued to call to me. Maybe it was a way of daring or defying death, but in the aftermath of what happened to my grandfather I plunged deeper into Lake Sunapee. Water was my element. I didn't want to come up. I wanted to stay submerged in silence.

Back in Hopedale, the woods close to our house held another kind of silence. No human talk, just rustling and chirping and scampering over leaves. I stalked through the bushes with my BB gun, a gift from my parents, a lever-action copy of a Winchester. I loved that gun. I loved my dog, a trusty beagle. I loved hunting chipmunks and squirrels and birds. I loved honing my skills as a junior woodsman. I couldn't articulate the term, but I had visceral knowledge of what it meant to be self-reliant. I hadn't yet read the New England writers and thinkers who had turned their dialogues with nature into philosophies, but their thoughts were in my blood. As a solitary creature in a forest where my problems in school didn't matter, I felt at home. Wild animals lived in these woods. And so did I.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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