

Jimi Hendrix: A Brother's Story

By Leon Hendrix, Adam Mitchell

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Leon Hendrix takes us back to the days before Jimi's amazing rise to fame in the 1960s, beginning with their tough childhood in Seattle, when their fascination with science fiction and UFOs helped them escape a difficult family life. (Jimi insisted his family call him "Buster," after *Flash Gordon* actor Buster Crabbe.) The author reveals Jimi's early fascination with sound, from his experiments with plucking wires attached to bedposts to the time when he got in trouble for taking apart the family radio ("I was looking for the music," he explained) to Jimi's purchasing his first guitar-a Sears, Roebuck and Co. acoustic, from a neighbor.

Leon recounts Jimi's early days performing on the "Chitlin' Circuit," when Jimi would call from the road to play early versions of tracks for the classic album *Are You Experienced*, and illuminates the biographical roots of Jimi's most well-known rock & roll songs. Readers learn about the heady days of sex and drugs that came with Jimi's skyrocketing fame in the sixties and how Leon felt Jimi's management isolated him from the rest of the family. The author speaks of his own heartbreak, learning of his brother's sudden death while incarcerated in Washington State's Monroe Reformatory.

Commemorating what would have been Jimi's seventieth birthday, Leon Hendrix's poignant and captivating account sheds new light on a music legend.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Memoirs about rock stars written by family members, friends, ex-wives and quickie backstage assignations are a wildly divergent lot that alternately take the narrative tracks of score-settling, axe-grinding, deification or exploitation. Fortunately, this effort by Jimi Hendrix's younger brother is a mostly sweet remembrance of the rock legend, heavy on tales of their youthful adventures (and misadventures) as Leon and the brother everyone called "Buster" (after Flash Gordon serial actor Buster Crabbe and Jimi's love of science fiction) grew up under less than ideal circumstances….While other Hendrix books have concentrated on his roles as musical genius, troubled soul and visionary dead far too soon, this one celebrates the sweet, shy, protective older brother -- who just happened to wear crazy clothes and set his guitar on fire.” ?*Houston Press*

“Although several books have been written about the artist, this one has a different perspective since it is Jimi's life as seen through the eyes of his younger brother, Leon. This highly readable book reveals the origin and meaning of many of the classic Hendrix tunes, which Jimi often played for his brother over the phone while he composed and was on the road. The complicated family dynamic, the culture of sex and drugs that came with Jimi's fame is also chronicled. This biography is being released just months before what would have been Jimi's 70th birthday.” ?*Tucson Citizen*

“While the rest of the world knew the great guitarist as Jimi, Leon Hendrix knew him as ‘Buster,' his big brother and protector. While Leon clearly idolized his older brother, he tells a balanced and honest story of his parents' broken marriage and substance abuse, and the peripatetic life he and Jimi led with their father. With the help of Mitchell (co-author of Street Player), Leon, in an informal yet intimate tone, chronicles his own life as much as his brother's, presenting the divergent paths they took: Jimi channeling his energies into making music while Leon lived a hustler's life filled with drugs and crime. Mixed in with the Hendrix family melodrama are some great vignettes (Jimi trying to make music with a one-string ukulele or wires and rubber bands)--that truly give a glimpse of the real Jimi behind the on-stage antics and flamboyant clothing. Leon also has some unique insights into Jimi's music, especially when he opines on the inspiration for some of his brother's powerful lyrics (he felt "Machine Gun" betrayed Jimi's "fear and paranoia").” ?*Publishers Weekly*

“His little brother Leon gives us ‘Buster,' the Jimi Hendrix only his family knew. Keeping it real all the way, Leon Hendrix gives us an entirely new, life-size portrait of Jimi.” ?*Joel Selvin, author of the classic Summer of Love and co-author of Sammy Hagar's New York Times #1 bestseller Red: My Uncensored Life in Rock*

About the Author

LEON HENDRIX lives in Los Angeles and is pursuing his art and music full-time in the Leon Hendrix Band. In addition to touring across North America and Europe, he is also the owner of Rockin Artwork LLC, a company that licenses Jimi Hendrix's likeness and image.

ADAM MITCHELL is also the author of *Street Player: My Chicago Story* with legendary drummer Danny Seraphine. He lives in Los Angeles.

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1

RAINIER VISTA PROJECTS

One of my earliest memories is of my older brother and me running around in the field next to where we lived at the Rainier Vista housing projects in Seattle, Washington. Our dad, Al Hendrix, and our mama, Lucille, held daily parties at our home and typically instructed us to go out and play whenever the place got too crowded and we started getting in the way. I couldn't have been more than two years old at the time, while my brother was six or seven. As we ran around, we were still able to hear the commotion inside—the tinkling sound of ice being dropped into cocktail glasses and the howling laughter echoing from the living room. When I stopped and looked in through the front picture window every once in a while, our parents seemed as happy as could be. But most of the time that couldn't have been further from the truth. Both Dad and Mama were big drinkers, who loved to be the life of the party. Later in the day, when the booze wore off, life was a completely different reality. That's when the shouting and cussing started.

At that time, their relationship was rocky to say the least, but things didn't start out that way. Early on, the two of them had plenty of good times. Mama was just a kid when she met Dad. She hadn't yet turned seventeen years old back when he asked her along to a dance at the Washington Club. Being six years older, Dad wasn't sure it was going to work out between them, but time told a different story. Both of them loved to dance and party, so they quickly grew close. Before long, they were inseparable. Dad found work in the Seattle downtown area busing tables at a restaurant on Pike Street called Ben Paris, then ground it out as a day laborer at an iron foundry until he eventually left and moved on to Honeysuckle's Pool Hall. Overall, their life together was good.

Then the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and everything changed. The U.S. government sent Dad his draft notice around the same time that Mama found out she was pregnant with her first child. They had to make the best of this tough situation. Dad knew he was going to be leaving soon, so he and Mama got married in a quickie ceremony on March 31, 1942. They were officially husband and wife for less than a week before Dad checked into the armory at Fort Lewis and was later sent on to basic training at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. Dad was stationed at Camp Rucker in Alabama when he received the telegram from Mama's sister, our aunt Delores, telling him that his child had been born. He was now the proud father of a beautiful baby son, whom Mama named John Allen Hendrix. After Dad shipped out overseas in early January of 1943, Aunt Delores did her best to send him photos of his boy every so often so he could see how big he was growing, but it was hard for Dad to focus on anything but the war. He was always on the move and was stationed in the Fiji Islands, Guadalcanal, and then New Guinea.

Back home in Seattle, times were tough for Mama. She left her parents' house to move in with a friend and was soon struggling to make ends meet and take care of her little boy. Mama was only a young kid herself and fell into a routine of going out and partying. She bounced around from one living arrangement to the next until the burden got to be too much. Unable to take care of her little boy, Mama was forced to do something drastic. After a brief time with Grandma Clarice and Grandpa Jeter, Dad's baby boy ended up in the care of a woman named Mrs. Walls for another short time, until she unexpectedly passed away. Fortunately, her sister, Mrs. Champ, came and took responsibility for little Johnny. When Mrs. Champ brought him back to where she lived in Berkeley, California, she sent Dad a letter letting him know of the situation. No matter what was going through his mind, he was halfway around the world and couldn't do much about what was going on back home in Seattle. Now his boy was living in California, and our mama, well, Dad wasn't exactly sure where she was spending her time.

When Dad finally got back from the war in September of 1945 and returned to Seattle, his first order of business was to make his way to Berkeley to get his boy. My brother wasn't at all happy to be taken from the home he was used to living in for close to the first three years of his life. Suddenly, a stranger whom he'd never seen before, except maybe in a blurry war photo, showed up at the door one day and told him he was

his father and was taking him to a faraway place. No young boy was going to react well to that type of news. And that wasn't even the worst part. As soon as the two of them returned to Seattle, Dad marched my brother down to the King County office and legally changed his name from John Allen Hendrix to James Marshall Hendrix. Not only had my brother been taken away from the people he had come to know as family, but he was also being told his name wasn't going to be Johnny Allen anymore, it was going to be *Jimmy*.

Dad wasn't back in Seattle's Central District area long before Mama showed up where he was living with my brother at Aunt Delores's house in the projects of Yesler Terrace. I'm sure Dad didn't know what to think about everything that had happened while he was gone in the military all those years. But he still loved her. No matter what she did or how many times she disappeared to do her thing, I don't believe Dad ever stopped loving her. So, they reconciled and decided to give it another go. The back-and-forth pattern was repeated often throughout our childhood.

When I came along, Leon Morris Hendrix, on January 13, 1948, Dad and Mama's fighting was put on hold for a while because Dad was overjoyed to have another baby boy in the family. Because of the war, he'd missed my brother's early years and was now being presented with a second chance to be a father to an infant son. Not long after I was born, the four of us moved into a two-bedroom place at 3022 Genesee Street in the Rainier Vista projects, a former military housing facility. During the war, the military had put up barracks all over the city of Seattle for all of the army and navy personnel because the government thought that Japan was going to invade the country. When the war ended, the facilities became low-income housing for mostly black and Jewish families.

Just shy of a year after I came into the picture, Mama gave birth to another boy, whom she and Dad named Joseph Allen Hendrix. I was too young to remember much of Joe, but I do know that the added mouth to feed put even more strain on our parents' relationship. Also, Joe was born with serious health problems, including a cleft palate, one leg shorter than the other, and a clubfoot. These issues were going to cost plenty of money to treat and Mama and Dad couldn't afford it. For help, Dad turned to his mama, our grandma Nora Hendrix, and eventually decided that the best thing was to send the three of us to live with her in Canada for the summer of 1949. The short break was enough time for Dad and Mama to get things temporarily sorted out. Unfortunately, everything was just as complicated when the three of us returned to the Rainier Vista projects at the end of the summer. The financial situation hadn't changed much. Dad and Mama still couldn't afford to get Joe the medical attention he needed.

In the fall of 1950, not long after my brother was setting off to attend second grade at Horace Mann Elementary, Mama had a baby girl that she named Kathy Ira. Not only was Kathy born four months premature, but Mama and Dad also learned she was blind. Our parents now had four children to care for, two of which had special needs. After trying to hold it together for the next year, there was no choice but to place Kathy in foster care.

In October of 1951, shortly after Kathy was made a ward of the state, Mama gave birth to another daughter she named Pamela. Still scraping by to try to take care of Jimmy, Joe, and me, Mama and Dad were forced to give her to foster care as well.

By then, my brother had begun his third-grade year at Rainier Vista Elementary School and our family was still living in our small two-bedroom apartment. Since he hadn't yet received the proper medical care, Joe still struggled with his health problems. If there was any possibility of him being able to get around without a limp, he needed an operation on his leg. It was a surgery Mama and Dad didn't have the money to pay for.

Our place in the projects remained the site of an ongoing party where people came and went at all hours. Whenever my brother and I sneaked back inside from playing in the fields, we made our way around the room stealing the last drops of beer out of the discarded bottles on the floor and the coffee table. Many people thought it was funny to see me swigging away on a bottle in the middle of the party. I might have believed we were being sneaky and pulling a fast one, but I later found out that Dad and Mama purposely left three or four sips in the bottom of a beer bottle for us. I was especially hyperactive for my age, and they found the little bit of alcohol kept me calm. After a couple hits of beer, I became a quiet, obedient, and, eventually, tired little boy.

Many people don’t understand that while growing up, my brother was always called Buster, and rarely Jimmy. He only got used to being called Jimmy much later when he was older and more comfortable with himself and his surroundings. During his childhood, Jimmy was the name our dad gave him after he got out of the army. Whenever Dad insisted on using it, my brother threw a fit. They constantly went back and forth about it.
“That’s not my name,” my brother cried out. “My name’s Johnny!”
“I am telling you for the last time, boy, your name is James Marshall Hendrix!” Dad shouted back. “Jimmy is your name!”
My brother eventually realized Dad wasn’t e...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Monson:

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them household or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or even playing video games all day long. In order to try to find a new activity this is look different you can read a book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent all day long to reading a e-book. The book Jimi Hendrix: A Brother's Story it is rather good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. These were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space bringing this book you can buy the particular e-book. You can m0ore simply to read this book out of your smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book offers high quality.

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