



Hell's Angel: The Life and Times of Sonny Barger and the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club

Ralph Barger, Keith Zimmerman, Kent Zimmerman

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The only authorized, authentic book about the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club by founding member, Sonny Barger—featuring a brand new introduction

Narrated by the visionary founding member, *Hell's Angel* provides a fascinating all-access pass to the secret world of the notorious Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club. Sonny Barger recounts the birth of the original Oakland Hell's Angels and the four turbulent decades that followed. *Hell's Angel* also chronicles the way the HAMC revolutionized the look of the Harley-Davidson motorcycle and built what has become a worldwide bike-riding fraternity, a beacon for freedom-seekers the world over.

Dozens of photos, including many from private collections and from noted photographers, provide visual documentation to this extraordinary tale. Never simply a story about motorcycles, colorful characters, and high-speed thrills, *Hell's Angel* is the ultimate outlaw's tale of loyalty and betrayal, subcultures and brotherhood, and the real price of freedom.

Hell's Angel: The Life and Times of Sonny Barger and the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club Details

Date : Published October 2nd 2001 by William Morrow Paperbacks (first published January 1st 1975)

ISBN : 9780060937546

Author : Ralph Barger , Keith Zimmerman , Kent Zimmerman

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Biography, Crime, True Crime, Autobiography, Memoir, Mystery

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From Reader Review Hell's Angel: The Life and Times of Sonny Barger and the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club for online ebook

Dave says

I feel like I really know Sonny Barger after reading Hell's Angels. Even though he is a convicted felon, drug runner, and violent man he really does seem like a stand up guy. The best way I could describe Sonny after reading his autobiography would be as a very loyal and honest friend. The founder of the world wide motorcycle club the " Hell's Angels" and the founder of a world wide brother hood, Sonny created an expansive sanctuary for those who wanted to be part of something. Regardless of Sonny's past I believe he has a very large and warming heart which is portrayed in many of the stories considering him and his motorcycle club. I would recommend this to anyone who isn't a child. Outstanding read.

SouthWestZippy says

Wow!

Alex says

An interesting and entertaining little book that teeters a fine line between "I'm not really a bad man, honestly guvnor" and "Nobody f**ks with me, because I'm a c*nt". But it does leave you with more questions than answers.

It's not as free flowing and truthful as other autobiographies, like "Broadmoor" by Charlie Bronson for instance, where he's already paid the price and so can speak freely.

Barger comes across as someone who has got away with a lot more than he's letting on, and so can't say as much as he would like to, for fear of being called to account.

I don't wholly believe a lot of what Barger claims, and still question how a *club* whose only proclivity is to ride and party could support millions of dollars in legal costs, fighting a RICO case without a substantial source of combined income.

What the book lacks most is emotional depth. It's an almost mechanical recounting of situations and circumstances, with very little about how Barger felt or what drove his decisions and actions beyond a crude kind of teenage revolt that he should have outgrown long ago.

He comes across as a bit of a childish, petulant bully. He refers to himself as a "warrior" and a vet because he happened to be in the services, despite having managed to avoid the draft and having never seen any action at all.

The picture he paints is of a group of frightened, hopeless young men who band together to feel safe, never fight one-on-one and do everything they can to create an aggressive and intimidating image so that no one will ever mess with them. No wonder brotherhood is so important.

It's definitely worth reading alongside Thompson's book for a broader picture - both sides are clearly underplayed, exaggerated and embellished in different places for different purposes.

Mads says

3* review –

Ensiform says

The Angel story told by the longtime president of the Oakland chapter. Bold and informative stuff, one would think, right? Wrong. Barger seems to be not only the most taciturn and non-introspective memorialist ever, but just plain dumb. He tells the reader nothing about what he feels, thinks, opines, or even guesses about any of the events of his life. Why did he rise to become leader of the Angels – not how, but why? What's special about him? The book doesn't reveal the answer.

What does he think of Hunter Thompson? "Chicken-shit," of course, even though by Barger's own admission Thompson told an Angel to his face he was a punk for hitting a woman and a dog. That's the basic problem with the book: everyone who isn't Barger or Barger's best buddy is a fool and coward, period. That's the extent of the insight you get as to what makes the guy tick. Useless.

Gina M Jordan says

I'm giving it 4 stars mainly because it's a dangerous subject written by an insider & founder. Barger 's writing style could definitely be more warm & forthcoming, many key details or depth are missing. This is certainly not a tell-all book by any means but does include quite a few juicy tidbits, mostly involving deceased members.

Having been involved in one 9 what Barger called the big 4 (Outlaws) myself, I'm actually amazed this book exists at all. MC's are closed societies like the Eagles Club, with private matters never revealed to non-members. So I give kudos for the courage to put this & Barger 's other books about the MC & lifestyle out there. Unless one is a part of this life, it is impossible to imagine that the events truly happened, but I can honestly tell you, as unbelievable as you may find these stories, Barger has barely begun to reveal the true stories behind the MC closed doors. Life is stranger than fiction.

kesseljunkie says

I like Barger. He's a blue-collar, no-shit guy from nowhere who became someone by virtue of simply being who he was. I have to admire that.

I don't admire some of the stuff he did in his life, but the book is like listening to one long and terrific tale from a guy you happen to start talking to in a bar, only to find out at the end of it that holy crap, yes, he's *that* guy. There's nothing false about him - he simply serves it to you, in his voice and from his point of view. Honestly, out of the autobiographies I've read, this is easily one of the most engaging.

It's not the greatest work of literature in the world, but it's well worth picking up and reading.

Adam Greven says

An interesting look at the history and development of the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club. Sonny Barger is a charismatic writer who keeps you glued to the pages with his wild adventures. It does shy away from much of the criminal element of the One-Percenter world and instead focuses on the heart and origin of outlaw Motorcycle Clubs. I think it is good at showing the true intention behind the formation of those older clubs as well as tell a lot of funny, crazy, and the sometimes very sad stories of Sonny Barger and his brothers. You will also find it hard not to find yourself nodding your head in agreement as Sonny stands up for troops coming home from Vietnam, supporting his brothers through drug rehabilitation, and standing up to his own demons. Just keep in mind this is only one, one sided, story of this world and should be a part of a larger collection of reading material. Also see Under and Alone, Prodigal Father Pagan Son, and Terry the Tramp: The Life and Dangerous Times of a One Percenter, etc.

Rob Charpentier says

As a general rule, I stay away from autobiographies simply because I feel that it's absolutely impossible to be objective about the subject of oneself. That said, there are of course a few exceptions...only, this book is not one of them but I have my reasons nonetheless.

The biggest reason is that I have some personal history with Sonny that is admittedly a few degrees removed from myself. As a teenager, Sonny apparently would eat dinner over at my grandparent's house who lived on E. 25th St. in Oakland just a few blocks away from his own grandmother's house where he lived for a time on E. 17th. This questionable "brush with greatness" gives me a certain fascination with the man that I am powerless over.

This family association was actually confirmed by Sonny himself when my brother went to a book signing of his in S.F. shortly after this book was published. As he got his autographed copy, he casually brought up the family name and without any prompting, Sonny fondly recalled two of my uncles by their first names. So, he either has hell of a memory, or my uncles were truly unforgettable. Can't say which for sure.

Anyways, more to the point...making ones living as a rebel outlaw surely makes for some colorful storytelling. Of which, it can be said this book does not lack. Also, as we've seen by my story about my family, his memory is rather sharp and so his recall cannot be questioned. However, one has to be careful in what one divulges about this kind of past and along with the two twin brother writer's of his that helped him pen this book, I'm pretty sure a few lawyers were consulted also.

Unfortunately, my opinion is that having this many consultants/editors on this book must have reduced its pages greatly & the book is rather short and somewhat disconnected in its narrative because of it. Rather than

following a strictly chronological story, the chapters are loosely arranged into a timeline that are more or less grouped into themes rather than by time and place. Then, some of the paragraphs are really nothing more than random blurbs about a particular subject with no real connection to the next paragraph.

Nevertheless, despite its brevity and some minor continuity problems this book covers some serious ground of a fascinating period we can essentially just call "counterculture history." This is also told from a perspective that is to say the least unique, if not rarely heard from. Of course, this is Sonny's first book, and he has gone on to write four more, so his voice is getting a little more exposure these days.

In this one, which is an attempt at an overview of the personal story of the founder and his infamous motorcycle club, we hear his thoughts and musings of firsthand accounts with Hunter S. Thompson, The Rolling Stones at Altamont, Ken Kesey & The Merry Pranksters, the Berkeley war demonstrations, etc.etc. to name a few. In a way, these pages almost read like a story written by Forrest Gump's parallel universe twin. The man has been everywhere and met everyone.

Naturally, the subject matter may not be to everyone's liking but in the end it should just be admitted that deep down we all have a certain fascination with rebels and outlaws. It all just depends on your particular viewpoint and filter as to what this may constitute and who we might think is deserving of the title. For some, Sonny Barger is nothing more than a reprehensible criminal, while to others he is a living demi-god. You can make up your own mind about him yourself [or summarily already have] but aside from ones own sense of right and wrong I personally find listening to his tale worth the read. I'm not sure if I would necessarily have Sonny over my own house for dinner like my grandparents did but I surely will give him some space on my bookshelf without hesitation.

Donna says

This book is listed on GR with the main page genre of 'autobiography'. That didn't feel completely accurate. It felt more like a 'history' of the how the Hell's Angels in Oakland came to be and how they were organized. It contained some interesting facts and even answered some of the questions I've always had.

The author did mention his 'early life' circumstances, but it done in a way of an explanation of how he ended up where he did. I listened to the audio, and while I can't fault anything he did, because it sounded fine.....I just had a hard time connecting his clean cut, boy next door voice to this leader of the Hell's angel.

JBP says

Sonny Barger's memoir of his life dedicated to the cause of the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club is somewhat interesting, but poorly written, a bit on the redundant side and all-to-brief when Barger goes into some episode of violence/sex/philosophy of the biker that I wanted to know more on. He should of really juiced this up and gave even more sex and violence and given an insider's tour of what it's really like to live the "outlaw" biker lifestyle that he gripes about non-stop in the pages of the book. Barger's been either in the club, in prison [or both] for nearly his entire life so the man has dedicated everything to the Hell's Angels--maybe that's why he didn't really go full-bore with the stories. They are often too brief as Barger just tells a little bit about this fight, murder, feud with other bikers. The book is pretty much sexless too! I would have thought there would have been much more to tell on this subject as much as Barger mentions the "hard

partying" they did. Could have and should have been a lot better!

David says

Hell's Angel, more or less, is the story of Ralph "Sonny" Barger, the leader of the notorious motorcycle group known as The Hell's Angels. Throughout the book Barger describes the inner workings of the motorcycle club, giving the reader a captivating, as well as extremely disturbing, idea of what the life of the most serious of motorcyclists is like. Undoubtedly, Hell's Angel will show you that the Hell's Angel's stand out among all other motorcycle gangs when it comes to the dedication to a group that is more like a family then a gang at all.

From the very first chapter, I found Hell's Angel to be extremely addictive; to the point where I felt that I couldn't put the book down for just a moment- in the same way that Sonny Barger would not put down a fellow member in even the most troubling of times. At just over 250 pages, Hell's Angel is a wonderful read, especially to any and all people who have been curious about the gang. The insight into Ralph Barger's life is rather empowering, despite showing a lifetime of pain and misfortune. Reading about Barger overcoming his cocaine habit (among many others) puts the nail in the coffin that there is nearly nothing in this world that Sonny Barger will be stopped by. After reading about Barger overcoming drugs, jail, and a painful childhood, I could only think that writing a book was one of the easier things Sonny Barger did in his lifetime.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in motorcycling, The Hell's Angel's motorcycle gang, or a story about a hardworking man who made a name for himself and his brothers.

Alex Irwin says

The life and times of Sonny Barger was a fascinating book that started with Sonny's true adventures of him riding across the country to different book signings for another book that he has written. This book quells many myths about how the Hell's Angels are out to hurt people and cause anarchy, but how most of the Gang are just normal people that love to ride and have a great time with friends. Sure, while most of the gang are not perfect role models, they aren't cold blooded killers that our society makes them out to be. Eventually this autobiography gets into how Sonny became a biker and how he got to this stage in his life. It was interesting because of how he had originally joined the military and learned useful skills for life, but was only 16 and when the officials finally became aware of this, he received a dishonorable discharge. Sonny loved to party and was kind of a crazy guy, stood up for what he believed in and did what he had to. Granted this is all taking place in the early 1960's and the gang has changed some, at heart they are still the same that they once were. Reading this book gives a whole new level of respect from me for Sonny and the Hell's Angels. Whenever he could he would always give advice to the younger people that came to his signings, a trait you wouldnt expect from a biker like him. It shines a new light on them that I have never seen before. I personally loved this book and thought it was very interesting to read, and would gladly recommend it to anyone.

Andrea says

I read this book in one weekend, which means that it was captivating enough to keep me turning the pages, and the simplicity of the oral style didn't hold things up either. I'm no biker, but I am keenly interested in the alternative lifestyles and subcultures of the 60's, and the iconic legend of the HAMC is an obvious object of curiosity and fascination. The fact that the events are told from an Angel's point of view,(and not just any Angel but Barger himself) rather than that of a journalist or an FBI infiltrator, is one of the big assets of this autobiography. However, it's also one of its main downfalls. Barger tells us only what he wants us to know, period. There is certainly a lot of dirt that is either simply not mentioned or glossed over. But this is hardly surprising considering the fact that he is not only still a member in good standing, but as a former president of the Oakland chapter in their heyday and a living legend among his bros, he is practically THE spokesman for the club. So, who can blame the guy for not giving up the goods? At any rate, one-sided as it is, this book is still a very readable account of some of the aspects of the outlaw lifestyle from a surviving Angel, who, and here you have to hand it to him, has never wavered in his fidelity to his chosen brotherhood. Good job by the Zimmerman twins who manage to remain invisible in their transcription of "the Chief's" story. And, as a bonus, I also learned a lot of technical details about motorcycles...not bad for a weekend read.

Lori says

I suffered through the first 2/3 of the book about how badass Sonny Barger (president of the Hell's Angels) thinks he is. It was 150+ pages about beating people, earning respect, loyalty, and brotherhood. Boiling it all down it seemed to be hundreds of men who can't handle the masses of alcohol and drugs they ingest. Finally, by the last 3rd of the book I found it interesting and not so juvenile.

The government and media fascination with the Hell's Angels was interesting. I had no idea about the lengthy court battles that went on or the media frenzy around the Hell's Angels for years. There were countless things the Hell's Angels should have gotten in trouble for individually but the governments main focus was trying to take down the whole club by whatever means possible, concocting stories, twisting facts, and trying to force conspiracies with informants planted in the club.

There were a few memorable tales, one that made me laugh out loud (shamefully) was how the club members in a normal night of excessive drug and alcohol use decided a casket would make an excellent table for Sonny's house, the next day he woke to a cool casket in his living room. He tried to move it but it was far too heavy, which is when he found the body in the stolen casket and forced the club members to remove it immediately. What the hell?!?

Through most of the book I just wondered, who the hell lives like this, so extremely outside of normal society. But it was interesting to try and understand why they think beatings and murder are perfectly acceptable forms of showing loyalty and respect. Why they'd rather kill someone, and have, rather than give up their motorcycle patch.
