



I Walked the Line: My Life with Johnny

By Vivian Cash

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I Walked the Line is a chronicle of first love, long-kept secrets, betrayal, forgiveness, and the truth--told at last by Johnny Cash's first wife, the mother of his four daughters. It is a book that had the full support of Johnny Cash, who insisted it was time for their story to be told, despite any painful revelations that might come to light as a result.

Many myths and contradictions regarding the life of Johnny and his family have been perpetuated for decades in film and literature. Vivian exposes previously untold stories involving Johnny's drug addiction, his fraught family life, and their divorce in 1968, as well as the truth behind the writing of two of Johnny's most famous songs, "I Walk the Line" and "Ring of Fire."

Supplemented by a never-before-published archive of love letters and family photos, *I Walked the Line* offers a deeper look at one of the most significant artists in music history. Here, fans and readers can experience the extraordinary account of love and heartbreak between Johnny and Vivian, and come to understand Vivian's dignified silence over the years. Through this elegant, revealing, and powerful memoir, Vivian Cash's voice is finally heard.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A little-known prequel to the late great Man in Black's famous life is adoringly revealed by his first wife and mother of his four daughters. Before there was June, there was Vivian, the 17-year-old girl from San Antonio, Tex., who met Cash in the summer of 1951 as he was headed overseas in the army. Three years of ardent letter writing sustained them—indeed, a good part of this book consists of Johnny's aching letters from 1951 to 1954, revealing his attempts to keep himself away from drinking and loose women, while begging her to wait for him and pray together. Finally wedded, the couple set out for Memphis, where Cash worked as a door-to-door salesman. After Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two began to travel, Vivian, pregnant from year to year, moved with him constantly, sewed his performance clothes and scribbled lyrics for *I Walk the Line* as he drove in the car. By 1961, as Vivian Cash tells it, when Johnny was drinking and popping pills heavily, June Carter joined Johnny's tour and tenaciously pursued him. Johnny and Vivian divorced in 1966. Vivian, who died in 2005, has told her story candidly to TV producer Sharpsteen, disclosing myriad tender details and an affecting ability to forgive. (Sept.)

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Review

"This book is the greatest part of my mother's legacy as a wife, a grandmother, a matriarch, a mother, and most important, a woman in love."

-- Kathy Cash

"Vivian was there from the beginning with Johnny. I loved reading *I Walked the Line*. It brought back memories of our good times together and how crazy it was back then."

-- George Jones

"Just when you thought you had a good idea who Johnny Cash was, in this book we get inside the heart of the Man in Black. Only a very few knew Johnny Cash like his beloved Vivian. Now for the first time we get the full picture of who Johnny Cash really was. His pen and heart expose this very complicated man. If you think you knew Johnny Cash, think again. You see the side he never let anyone on the outside see. The love letters of Johnny Cash will make even the biggest man sneak a tear."

-- Jimmy Carter, host of The Jimmy Carter Entertainment Report

"Here's a love story that encompasses ten thousand pages of love letters. I'm glad I was there to see a lot of that love in the early years in California. Vivian was a very special person in my life."

-- Johnny Western

"We all thought we knew everything about Johnny Cash, but this book clearly reveals more secrets than ever before. In an age of email and IMs it is sweet to read the tender love letters a heartsore young man wrote to his very young girlfriend. They are full of tenderness and sweetness and caring. It is sad to see how once success, alcohol, and drugs enter the picture, everything changes. We live through the heartaches of their shattered marriage, his addictions, and a turbulent life. Vivian, the first lover and wife of this musical legend, tells the tale in a powerful way, and I am sure that all the readers will get as much from reading it as I did."

-- Ivana Trump

"*I Walked the Line* is a wildly romantic book, but also a sad and wrenching one...an unusually intriguing memoir."

-- Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

"It's a mesmerizing story, complete with a bittersweet ending."

-- *The Tennessean*

"Riveting and dishy."

-- *The Washington Post*

"Viv's pained version of events depicted in *Walk the Line* deserves a hearing."

-- *Entertainment Weekly*

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INTRODUCTION

It was September 11, 2003, and although a beautiful day, there was an uneasiness in the air. My daughter Cindy had just arrived in town for a visit along with her husband, Eddie, and she felt it too -- an unmistakable sense of something amiss, something dreadful about to happen. So later that night when the phone rang at one thirty a.m., after we had all gone to bed, my heart froze. Phone calls in the middle of the night never bring good news.

And then a bone-chilling scream came from down the hall. Cindy was the first to hear the news: Johnny was dead.

For the rest of the night, none of us slept. Cindy was inconsolable, devastated, virtually drowning in grief after the call. She had spent the last three months with Johnny at his home, caring for him, doting on him, and she had just left for a quick visit to come see me. She was choked in grief now that she wasn't there when he passed. Helpless to do much else, I simply hugged her.

I knew firsthand the pain of losing a parent. I lost both of mine years ago. The coming weeks and months, even years, would be tough, not only for her but also for our other three daughters Johnny and I had together: Rosanne, Kathy, and Tara. Our poor babies would never be the same. I knew that much.

To the world, Johnny was revered as the Man in Black. But to us he was simply Daddy. To the girls, he was their world. And to me he is and will always be my wonderful, caring, protective husband and the father of my children. In disbelief I paced the floor.

Johnny was supposed to have been here in California, recording yet another record. He was to have visited New York for the MTV Music Awards on his way out, where he was excited to have been nominated in six categories. We were all excited. He and the producers of the show secretly planned for him to walk out onto the stage unassisted: Only recently his health had been improving, and he was walking again. But as fate would have it, what was thought to be a troubling case of heartburn sent him to the hospital instead. That's where he stayed for two weeks before being released. Then this sudden disastrous turn for the worse. And now our lives were spinning out of control.

Within hours, Johnny's death was the top story on all the cable news channels and morning

shows. The media frenzy had begun. CNN, Fox News, ABC, CBS, NBC, every channel I turned to, were all talking about our family.

The music world is mourning the death this morning of one of America's most influential performers, Johnny Cash...

Johnny Cash, the Man in Black, died this morning in a Nashville hospital at the age of seventy-one...

One of the greatest voices in American music is silent today...

It was surreal to hear them talking about Johnny in the past tense. Only eight weeks earlier, I had been with him in his home in Hendersonville, just north of Nashville, and we had enjoyed a wonderful visit. We sat and laughed about old times. We reminisced. We hugged and cried. We joked and teased each other. Looking back, that afternoon visit was a precious gift from God. My trip to Nashville had been a very last-minute decision, and I wasn't certain I would even have the chance to see Johnny. But I'm so thankful -- very, very thankful -- that God let us see each other one last time.

Ironically, it was during that visit that we discussed this book and I told him of my decision to write it. To be honest, I was a little nervous in telling him. I wasn't sure how he would react to me finally deciding to tell my story. Not only have I gone out of my way for years to not talk about our years together, but the real truth about our marriage and divorce has never been told. Now that I had decided to tell the truth, I wondered how he would feel about that.

My decision to write this book was a difficult one for me. Early on, I became aware that some of the things I planned on revealing would be upsetting to Johnny's second wife, June. I was also aware that some of her irritation might inevitably be targeted at Johnny. And with all of his medical problems at the time, I cringed at the possibility of imposing any additional misery on him.

Two months earlier, however, something happened that none of us expected: June passed away. It was a devastating blow to Johnny and to our girls, who had known June for many years by that time. However, along with the understandable sadness at her passing, I experienced a sense of liberation that I would be freer to say the things I have to say -- and Johnny would be freer to tell the truth too. The full story of our lives, the unvarnished truth, could now be told more easily without hesitancy. Would Johnny agree? I wouldn't know until I spoke with him.

During our visit, I settled in on a sofa by the fireplace in Johnny's bedroom and we chatted. It was so good to see him. He was enjoying improvement in his health in recent weeks. He had gone fishing for the first time in years. He had gone swimming. And he was walking again. On July 11 he took twenty-five steps unassisted. On July 12 he took seventy steps. It made me happy to hear of his continued improvement. And despite the fact that he was still obviously grieving the loss of June, I was thrilled to hear him say, "I'm happy."

One of the household help came into the bedroom with a silver tray carrying coffee and cream and sugar and set it on the coffee table. When she left, we finally had some privacy for me to share my news.

"Johnny," I said. As usual since the divorce, it was hard for me not to call him Honey. Years of

habit are hard to break. I concentrated as I chose my words. "Johnny, I have thought long about -- and prayed about -- writing a book. I want to write a book and tell our story, and the truth of what happened. I spoke with the girls, and they are in support of it. So I've made a decision to do it," I said. "How do you feel about that?" I kept my eyes fixed on Johnny's face, watching for a change in his expression.

"I've been thinking about that for the past couple years," he said without a breath of hesitation. "I think it's a great idea."

"Are you serious?" I asked. It surprised me that he had been thinking about it for a couple years. I was floored.

"Honestly, I have been," he said. "Viv, I've been thinking for years, if anyone on this planet should write a book about me, it should be you. It's time."

As we discussed the book, Johnny became more excited. I could tell his mind was whirling a mile a minute. "If there's anything I can do to help, I'll do it. I'll write the foreword too. All my fans will buy it. I know they will. It's time."

"It's time." Was I really hearing him right? I was overjoyed! Those simple words, "It's time," took on so many dimensions. It was one thing to have his blessing, which I had hoped for. But to have his encouragement and active support was wonderful. I was so glad he thought it was time.

"I hope it will be healing for you too," he added. Ironically, I wished the same for him.

I also explained to Johnny that in telling our story, I might help other women who have gone through troubles such as we had. I so much want for good to come out of those darkest hours.

"Johnny, some of your fans might be upset hearing the details of our divorce and what happened," I said. I do worry deeply about the reaction the public will have.

But Johnny didn't waver in his support. "Like I said, all my fans will read it. They'll love it," he said with confidence. "It's time."

And in that single moment, having Johnny's support and blessing confirmed in my heart that it was finally time to tell my story. Too many things were lining up and falling into perfect place, clearing the way for me. I felt God guiding me forward each careful step of the way, assuring me I was on the right path.

The truth is, I have only recently begun to feel the grace and the reconciliation of making sense of what happened to our marriage. And now, with Johnny's blessing, I would finally have what I longed to have for so many years in his shadow: a voice of my own to tell the world the truth.

"Johnny, that makes me so happy I could just *kiss* you!" There was no hiding the tears welling up in my eyes.

I laughed as Johnny stared at me with outstretched arms. "Well, here I am!" We shared one of the sweetest hugs we ever shared.

It hurts my heart to know that afternoon was the last time I would see Johnny. If I had known, I wouldn't have been so quick to leave. I would have spent the rest of the afternoon with him.

And I would have savored every minute.

I would have told him all the things I've wanted to tell him over the years but never did. I would have hugged him tighter. I would have told him how special he is, what a good man he is.

I would have held his hands and examined his face and searched for that young Johnny who stole my heart so many years ago. I would have relived so many more of the happy times with him. I would have asked questions that have lingered in my heart. I would have loved to hear him tell me what was in his heart too.

And maybe I would have told him my darkest secret, which I am only now able to admit. I would have told him that I never stopped loving him. Through all of it, despite everything, I never stopped loving him for one second.

Instead I just hugged him happily, said good-bye, and left thinking I would see him again soon. And now he's gone.

While word of Johnny's death spread around the globe, I sat quietly sipping coffee in our den at a window overlooking the Pacific Ocean. A world without Johnny hardly seemed possible.

In the hours that followed the horrible news, I did the only thing I could do, or have learned to do when times are bad: take each hour as it comes. As I managed through the next few days, my mind filled with memories of the life Johnny and I shared -- the adventures, the heartache, the success, the failures, the joy, the sadness, the secrets, the lies. And the regret.

In the weeks that followed Johnny's passing, ...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Daniel Engle:

Have you spare time for any day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or even read a book eligible I Walked the Line: My Life with Johnny? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with their opinion or you have additional opinion?

Tanya Nolan:

Reading a book for being new life style in this yr; every people loves to learn a book. When you study a book you can get a lot of benefit. When you read guides, you can improve your knowledge, simply because book has a lot of information in it. The information that you will get depend on what forms of book that you have read. If you need to get information about your examine, you can read education books, but if you want to entertain yourself you are able to a fiction books, this kind of us novel, comics, as well as soon. The I Walked the Line: My

Life with Johnny will give you a new experience in examining a book.

Blake Darden:

In this age globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make anyone to understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information much easier to share. You can find a lot of personal references to get information example: internet, newspapers, book, and soon. You will observe that now, a lot of publisher which print many kinds of book. Typically the book that recommended to you is I Walked the Line: My Life with Johnny this reserve consist a lot of the information on the condition of this world now. This specific book was represented so why is the world has grown up. The vocabulary styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some research when he makes this book. Honestly, that is why this book suited all of you.

Kristi Rowden:

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