

Neil Young's Heart of Gold

Always moving forward but never forgetting the past

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When we think of celebrities, we have an image that their lives are perfect, but we always seem to forget that they had a life before the fame too. In the twentieth chapter of Neil Young's autobiography, *Waging Heavy Peace*, Young wanders to a teen fair with a couple of his good friends, "taking in the sights, the sounds, the girls, the crowds...", when all of a sudden he starts to feel sick to his stomach. Lying on his back on the pavement, he feels like he was "...just born, and recognized no one."

Trying to move forward in the music industry, his constant fear of having another anxiety attack slowed him down. No matter how famous or rich you are, embarrassment feels the same for everyone. In his journal-like style, Young opens up about his early life as a child, his many health struggles and his ongoing career as an artist, but is a bit guarded when it comes to his children. In our paparazzi-driven, celebrity-worshipping, artist-idolizing society, many of us forget that celebrities are also human and also have struggles just like the rest of the world.

The Beginning

Born in Omemee, Ontario, a small town with a population of 750, Young had many health problems as a young child. At the age of six, Young contracted polio. At that point, the Salk vaccine did not exist and Young's life was on the line. After having a successful, but lengthy treatment, he had to learn how to walk again. Young's brother, Bob, recalls that he spent a lot of time being quarantined because of the diseases that Young caught, like diphtheria, measles, polio, and

others. In result of having poliomyelitis, he had to have a vertebrae removed in his lower back, which forced him to wear a brace for a very long time. He even toured with the brace on, including his famous concert recording that many people hold close, Massey Hall in 1971.

Young's father was writer and worked in their attic of their home in Omemee. When Neil Young was 12, his parents, Rassy and Scott Young, broke up. Young and his brother moved to Winnipeg while their dad stayed in Omemee and after that the boys did not see much of their father, who later on got Alzheimer's.

The shy dry-humoured boy's first band, The Jades, was formed while he was attending junior high school. When Young was enrolled in Kelvin High School, The Squires, his second band, was formed. He later dropped out of school to pursue his future in the music industry playing in as many dance halls and clubs as the band could get. After The Squires broke up, Young went solo for a while. Being highly influenced by Bob Dylan, he performed in many folk clubs, where he met Joni Mitchell. Having lots in common with this other upcoming artist, Young and Mitchell still have a long lasting friendship.

Buffalo Springfield and other collaborations

The 21 year old Young, and his friend, Bruce Palmer, decided to go to Los Angeles. Young was "...looking for a reason to stay in Winnipeg and finding a reason to leave." Once they arrived to their destinations, the met up with

Stephan Stills, and shortly after Buffalo Springfield was formed. This was Young's first big band that really put his name out there. Although the band did not stay together for long, their pieces are noteworthy.

After breaking up with the band, Young went solo for while. He shared a manager with Joni Mitchell, Elliot Roberts. His first solos album was *Neil Young*, which received mixed reviews. Throughout the autobiography, Young mentions how he has "...written a lot of songs. Some of them suck. Some of them are brilliant, and some are just okay."

Giving Back

Young's music is so touching to so many people because most of it is based on real life events. For example, after the massacre in Ohio, also known as the Kent State Shooting, where four college students were killed, Young protested using his music. He wrote a song called "Ohio" as a reaction. Another important piece of music that was written as a protest was Young's song "Let's Roll", as a reaction to 9/11. In the song, he says, "One's standing in the isle way, / Two more at the door, / We've got to get inside there / Before the kill some more."

Not only is Young a car enthusiast and a good citizen, but he is also an idol that many people look up to. He is humble about his work and proud of the people around him, and proud to be Canadian. His health battles may have slowed him down, but he has never let them stop him. This memoir takes some getting used to as Young writes in a stream-of-consciousness style, may not be his strongest point, as it is all over the place, he does give off a relaxing vibe.

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