



## Take This Man: A Memoir

*Brando Skyhorse*

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### **Take This Man: A Memoir** Brando Skyhorse

From PEN/Hemingway award winner Brando Skyhorse comes this stunning, heartfelt memoir in the vein of *The Glass Castle* or *The Tender Bar*, the true story of a boy's turbulent childhood growing up with five stepfathers and the mother who was determined to give her son everything but the truth.

When he was three years old, Brando Kelly Ulloa was abandoned by his Mexican father. His mother, Maria, dreaming of a more exciting life, saw no reason for her son to live his life as a Mexican just because he started out as one. The life of "Brando Skyhorse," the American Indian son of an incarcerated political activist, was about to begin.

Through a series of letters to Paul Skyhorse Johnson, a stranger in prison for armed robbery, Maria reinvents herself and her young son as American Indians in the colorful Mexican-American neighborhood of Echo Park, California. There Brando and his mother live with his acerbic grandmother and a rotating cast of surrogate fathers. It will be over thirty years before Brando begins to untangle the truth of his own past, when a surprise discovery online leads him to his biological father at last.

From an acclaimed, prize-winning novelist celebrated for his "indelible storytelling" (*O, The Oprah Magazine*), this extraordinary literary memoir captures a son's single-minded search for a father wherever he can find one, and is destined to become a classic.

### **Take This Man: A Memoir Details**

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## From Reader Review Take This Man: A Memoir for online ebook

### Stephanie says

Brando Skyhorse, a Pen/Hemingway award winner, was raised in the 1980s in the then-sketchy neighborhood of Echo Park adjacent to Dodger Stadium. He lived with his Mexican mother, Maria, who pretended that they were Native American, a bisexual grandmother who pretended that she was straight, and a series of no-account stepfathers who each got out when the getting was no longer good, taking "the small piece of me that wanted to be a man's son. With each successive father, that piece was regenerated, much larger than before, emerging each time with a stronger casing, a more cynical skin. . . ." Maria, a success as a phone sex operator, selected perspective suitors based on what part of the country she wished to visit, and she brought home man after man -- former prisoners, alcoholics, residents of homeless shelters -- who she exhorted her son to accept as the father he so desperately wanted. Some promised a life "free from the burdens of having to be my mother's full-grown man when I haven't even learned how to be a boy," but they all disappointed. "I'd been forgotten, easily abandoned, a distraction, an acceptable sidekick, a transparent sponge to soak up their truths and desires, and not able to express my own."

After fleeing for Stanford, then UC Irvine, followed by New York, Brando learns that he was not the son of an incarcerated Native American activist but, rather, that his Mexican birth father had abandoned him at 3 and raised another family within miles of Brando's childhood home. Forging a relationship with his father, and the half-sisters he had never known, allowed him to reconcile with his now-deceased mother. What made my mother tell incredible stories? "Stories can help you survive. They can transform your life -- they can transform you from where you are into wherever you want to be." Brando has written a remarkable, transformative memoir.

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### Corina says

I don't give 5 star ratings often. I may come back and modify it but right now, minutes after finishing the book, I think it well deserves the 5 stars, and then some.

I wanted to not like this book because of the rough language and the sometimes farcical scenes but those moments were outweighed by the times I wanted to reach out and take that little boy in my arms and snatch him from the damage I knew was being done to him.

I'm glad I stuck with it. This memoir is one not to be missed. It is well written and just the right length. I don't think the Reader could take a lot more of Maria or June's abuse, even though each one has their own story that, looked at with distance from Brando's story, makes them very sympathetic in their own way.

See if you can read it through and not cry like a baby at the last sentence. I couldn't.

This one should not be missed.

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### Judy Mann says

Let's be clear here. I'm only half way through and all I can say is this book needs about 4000 gallons of WD-40. Some shmaltz, some fat, some something. It's just so damn dry and lifeless that it's boring me to

tears. None of it seems believable but worse none of it is good to read. It needs some chicken fat- some bloody life to make it readable. There's just no umphh in this story. The writing is just that - writing. Nothing else. A whole lot of words -jammed together-making it just too dry to read. I'll finish it though because I liked his last book. But so far- feh..JM

I finished it -but what a chore. What a lousy book. Hard to read. Nothing very interesting - and frankly I think he was playing to the bleeding hearts in the crowd- which is a royal pain in the ass. Like look at how vulgar and ugly our Mexican lives are. And sure enough the critics ate it up. So he had a crazy mother. So? big deal . Everyone has a crazy mother. And this whole shmaltzy BS about "Finding his father....?" Give me a break.

What kind of heart string was he pulling there? Absolutely did not touch me in the slightest. At one point it almost got interesting- or it could have when he- "Brando" got fat and pimply in high school. Now that could've been interesting but alas our pal "Brando" dropped fast. Apparently-It wasn't literary enough. Running with Scissors was a Memoir. This is a phone book. I don't like being played and I don't like being played by a lousy writer. JM

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### **Aisling says**

My review must be qualified by my realization that I should no longer read memoirs. Fans of reality t.v. will love this book. For me it was an agonizing slog through someone's most painful and ugly memories...until the last 40 pages when the author reflects and then the book becomes truly great. There is writing there that I wanted to re-read and send to friends and say 'isn't that incredible writing/beautiful/true'. That kind of writing is rare. I will read everything I can by Skyhorse (as long as it is fiction from now on) and give these four stars because the end of this book was so strong.

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### **Melissa Gill says**

I loved this book, though sad as it is. I couldn't help but feel the author's pain as he was let down time and again, and treated so cruelly by his mother and grand mother. He is very honest and very giving in this story about his life. I am happy for him that he finally got to know his family and his sister. I'm also sad for him that the father he so desperately needed and wanted his whole life was really just a few miles away from him the whole time. Did his father's fear of being deported really trump the love he could've or should've had for his own son? A very powerful memoir and certainly glad I read it.

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### **Kate says**

Take This Man: A Memoir was a poignant read. This was my first introduction to the author Brando Skyhorse, and I am delighted that I had the opportunity to review his memoir by winning a copy of this book through Goodreads. Reading about Skyhorse's childhood was distressing at times. Skyhorse's mother Maria had men revolving in and out the door, was a phone sex operator, and lied to her son about his ethnicity throughout his childhood. Sadly, even Brando Skyhorse's name is fictitious and evolved out of his mother's desire to recreate a different identity for her son than that of a boy who was abandoned by his Mexican father. Take This Man is a very addictive memoir that explores decades of Skyhorse's search for the truth, and search for his biological father. Also, I think this memoir is a testament to Skyhorse's resiliency, and his uncommon ability to overcome extreme childhood trauma. I was very impressed with this memoir, and I plan on reading his other book The Madonnas of Echo Park. This memoir as well as the author deserves

many accolades not only for being an exceptional writer, but also for being an extraordinary survivor.

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## **DeB MaRtEnS says**

On page 108 of Take This Man by Brandon Skyhorse, I paused to consider why I was reading this book. In general, I appreciate memoirs. I thought that I would appreciate and learn why many of my favourite authors, who had written their own moving personal stories, endorsed this one so glowingly. Neither, I realized, had come to pass by this point in the book.

A motley group of Goodreads reviews hinted at where I might find the real magic...at the end of this man's memoir, after all the words reporting the tragic, repetitively cruel treatment of his negligent mother and grandmother. I turned to page 220, and finally was able to FEEL the person behind the story, the inner search, to appreciate his eloquence, to see a damaged man try to come to terms with the chaos of his father's abandonment and his mother's casual selection of husbands as serial father substitutions. Skyhorse told us his tale. It came from a person disconnected from and trying to survive a crazy world. However, the person, the child and the author did not connect emotionally until the final written pages and as a result neither could I.

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## **Barb says**

What does it take to crush the spirit of a child? Denigrate him constantly. Marry five men, each marriage long enough for a child to bond to his new "father", then banish each man from the home in a fit of pique. Put the burden of blame for the breakups on the child and continue to have many many more boyfriends. Purge your son's childhood memories by cutting out the photo images of past father figures. Remove the security of an ethnic identity and moral code. That should do it. But there's more.

Take This Man: A Memoir, by Brando Skyhorse, a Pen/Hemingway award winning author, is a powerful book, achingly honest and difficult to read...yet who can tear themselves away. We need to know that Brando survives this tortuous toxic life and thrives into adulthood...please!

Brando Skyhorse was born and carelessly raised in Echo Park, Los Angeles by a volcanic tempered, expletive spewing, narcissistic mother who gave him an Indian sounding name to reflect her fantasy desire to be an American Indian rather than of Mexican decent. But Brando is intelligent and resilient and when a lifeline is provided grasps it tightly. Somehow the gift of reading and writing planted early in his brain allows him to pull himself up, and we all benefit from his self reflection honestly and insight.

This book may sound like a hatchet job on his mother but, on the contrary, at times I think Mr. Skyhorse is too easy on her and the cruel damage she inflicted on him. I hope that, when he feels ready, he does choose to be a father someday. Then he will realize that the feelings of deep love and protection, of putting someone's needs before your own were missing from his broken mother. In spite of his misgivings I think Brando Skyhorse would make a great father.

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## **Claire says**

I received Take This Man as part of a Goodreads giveaway.

"Unconventional" is not strong enough of a word to describe Brando Skyhorse's upbringing. Mexican-American by birth, his mother Maria lied to him for years about his heritage (that he was Native American) and the identity of his father (who he was told was an incarcerated American Indian activist). Over the course of Brando's childhood and adolescence, five fathers cycled through his life, most dodgy characters in ways that ranged from the criminal to the just plain sad.

The constants in the story--Brando, his mother Maria, and his grandmother June--are heartbreakingly real--Brando as a generally smart and sensitive kid trapped in a vortex of dysfunction, his adoring but tough grandmother who has a strange soft spot where her daughter is concerned, and Maria herself, who manages to steal the narrative with her larger than life personality that manifested itself in destructive and often emotionally abusive ways. As much as I wanted to throttle her, though, there was something about her that I couldn't absolutely hate. She was just so sad--a mess--and it's a shame she had to take it out on her son. It's amazing to me that Brando has turned out as relatively well-adjusted as he has, though as he recounts in the closing pages, his rocky childhood has had a lasting effect on his personal relationships.

A really fascinating read that will make many people thankful for the upbringing they had.

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### **Rebecca says**

A Mexican-American novelist explores the sadness and humor of his dysfunctional childhood. "A chorus of six men calling me Son might sound ludicrous to you, but to me it's the sound of survival." Skyhorse grew up in Echo Park, Los Angeles in the 1970s. His Mexican mother, a compulsive liar, renamed him as a Native American and disowned his biological father, who left when Skyhorse was three. Over the years she introduced five 'fathers' and a plethora of boyfriends into her son's life. It is no surprise that, in such an unsettled environment, the author "thought family members were like trading cards."

You might think a story like this – of lies, drugs and alcohol, and child abuse – would be impossibly dark. However, the remarkable thing about Skyhorse's memoir is his matter-of-fact, often humorous style. His childhood was full of undeniable pain, but his enthusiasm for storytelling got him through.

(Non-subscribers can read an excerpt of my full review at [BookBrowse](#).)

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### **Elizabeth says**

*May the Great Spirit Guide You...*

Is it wrong that on the nights that I am ruminating on the (many!) ways I have screwed up my kids that I think back to the many memoirs I have read and comfort myself with the knowledge that maybe my kids will be alright?

Case in point: Brando Skyhorse. His (Mexican) mom pretended they were Native American. His grandma pretended she was straight. He had, I think, FIVE stepfathers (who he hilariously cast as various Hollywood actors). This does not include all the men his mom dated and paraded into his life. Then, in case all that was not enough, his mom tries to put him up for adoption by placing an ad in a magazine. She ends up making better money as a phone sex operator.

And (of course) he ends up attending Stanford.

Art.

It saves lives.

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## Neeter says

This is one of the best books I've read in a long time. It features a young boy who is sort-of-kind-of named "Brando Skyhorse." His mother constantly lies to him about his real name as well as about his heritage and upbringing, so it's hard for Brando (or the reader) to know what is real and what is fabricated. He has no real sense of identity but only one that is constructed in his mother's "interesting" imagination.

In addition to having an emotionally unstable, pathologically lying, immature mother, Brando lives with a grandmother who alternatively protects him and throws him under the bus. One of the themes in this book (at least to this reader) is how a child loves his caregivers forever, despite the evils that they do to him. No parent is perfect but Brando's mother is imperfect to the point of being emotionally as well as physically abusive, and while I was frustrated at his constant love of and need for approval from her, I also "got" it in a way that I can't really articulate. I suppose a redeeming factor is that she was quite obviously mentally ill (or at least I "hope" that she was, or else her treatment of Brando would be inexplicable).

Brando doesn't know his real father growing up, and he has a revolving series of stepfathers. His mother tells him that each man, in turn, is his true father and she pressures him to forget about past fathers as new ones arrive. Some of the past stepfathers reappear at different points in his life, however, just to give him enough hope that he will finally have a permanent "father," and then to dash that hope to pieces by disappearing yet again. He finally, as an adult (which is revealed in the prologue so is not a spoiler) makes contact with his real father but in this reader's humble opinion, that father isn't too much better than most of the stepfathers that come in and out of Brando's life.

If you couldn't tell from my description above, I was very disgusted with all of the adults in this book and I felt so bad for Brando. But what intrigued me was his ability to rise above his quite horrible upbringing and forge his own identity and personality. Of course, this personality is not a flawless one and has its share of issues but overall I'm convinced that the narrator rose above his obstacles and dealt with them in the best way that he knew how. He is obviously a bright and talented man and I imagine him to be quite gentle-natured as well. The writing in this book is overall excellent, although there are some tense issues I found problematic. I know that in a memoir there are often flashbacks mixed with in-the-moment "memories" mixed with foreshadowing and the like, but it would often change from one tense to another within the same paragraph or so and that left me a bit confused and distracted. Otherwise I enjoyed the flow of the story and found the subject matter to be very compelling. At times I couldn't put the book down and it was one of those rare treats that I just wanted to savor and immerse myself in.

I thought about giving this book four stars due to the tense issues but it is one of my all-time favorites and so I give it five stars despite its flaws. And I give the narrator five stars for "surviving" such a crappy upbringing and for telling his story so eloquently. I feel that he has made beautiful art out of an ugly past and I was glad that he had shared his story with me.

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### **Brooke says**

I did not enjoy reading this book. Not one bit. There was not a single idyllic moment in Skyhorse's childhood. It was lies and shouting and instability. His mother's never-diagnosed mental illness (unless she were simply a huge asshole) muddied every almost-good memory. But, in the end, Brando finds people who don't lie and shout and try to break him. It hardly seems enough, but somehow it's hopeful.

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### **Alder Yarrow says**

What a fantastic and breathless memoir. We all think our parents are crazy, but you ain't seen nothin' until you've met Brando's mom. Surviving his childhood was a remarkable feat. Surviving it to be able to write a book filled with such humanity and grace is a triumph. If you liked the Glass Castle, this is even better. Highly recommended.

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### **Colleen Oakes says**

Take This Man, in the same vein as The Glass Castle - which is my favorite memoir - had that same violent and raw look at a dysfunctional family that both entertained and ripped at your own heart. Brando Skyhorse has quite the story, and like his mother, he is quite the storyteller. Ripped from father to father, none who could be bothered to stay with his psychopathic mother and his equally aggressive grandmother, women who circled men like emaciated tigers, Skyhorse longs for a father who will overcome his mother, their poverty and his own growing aggression towards the men who flit in and out of his train-wreck of a life. I read it in two days, and loved not only the story of his past, but his reflections on where his life will take him from here. It was a beautiful story of rising from the ashes where a father should have been.

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