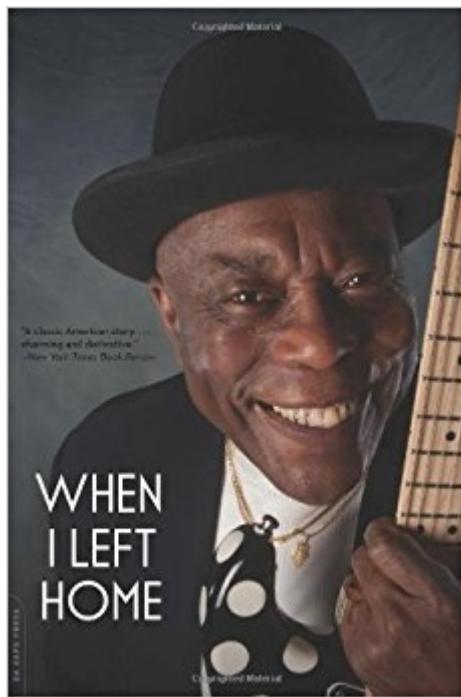


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When I Left Home: My Story



Synopsis

According to Eric Clapton, John Mayer, and the late Stevie Ray Vaughn, Buddy Guy is the greatest blues guitarist of all time. An enormous influence on these musicians as well as Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, and Jeff Beck, he is the living embodiment of Chicago blues. Guy's epic story stands at the absolute nexus of modern blues. He came to Chicago from rural Louisiana in the fifties—the very moment when urban blues were electrifying our culture. He was a regular session player at Chess Records. Willie Dixon was his mentor. He was a sideman in the bands of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. He and Junior Wells formed a band of their own. In the sixties, he became a recording star in his own right. When I Left Home tells Guy's picaresque story in his own unique voice, that of a storyteller who remembers everything, including blues masters in their prime and the exploding, evolving culture of music that happened all around him.

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Customer Reviews

This book, written with the help of David Ritz (whose written about Marvin Gaye, Janet Jackson, B.B. King, Leiber and Stoller, and others), is Guy's personal look back from his beginnings to the present time. Thankfully the book retains the flavor of Guy's speech in the word/sentence structure—it wasn't "cleaned up" grammatically or otherwise. Guy also sprinkles profanities throughout his story. One disappointment are the b&w photographs. All but one (of Guy's father) are from much later in Guy's life. It would have been nice to see Guy in earlier periods of his life. There's also a pretty good Selected Discography included. Guy begins by talking about his solid family up-bringing and the hard life they shared. Writing about their living conditions, Guy describes

the wooden shack on pillars, having no water, no electricity, a wood burning stove, glassless windows, and the isolation they encountered. A telling moment is when Guy writes about crawling under their home and lying in the cool dirt to escape the heat. And that the family ate "fresh non-bird meat" only once a year. Guy's introduction to the guitar was through Henry Smith, a family acquaintance, whose style Guy studied intently. Guy's family scrounged together the \$4.35 to buy Smith's guitar, and from that point Guy played that guitar whenever he could—even sleeping with it. With electricity finally reaching the area, Guy heard John Lee Hooker's "Boogie Chillen", Muddy Waters, and Lightnin' Hopkins, among others. Moving to Baton Rouge, Guy's first real performance was with a man called Big Poppa. But when it came time for Guy to sing, he turned to the wall and sang—and was promptly fired. But most importantly, Baton Rouge is where Guy came under the influence of the great Guitar Slim. Slim's playing ability and showmanship would heavily influence Guy throughout his career. It's nice to hear directly from Guy about this seminal, important period in his development. Talked into moving to Chicago, Guy writes about the many great blues players he encountered—Muddy Waters, Earl Hooker, Otis Rush, Magic Sam, and others. This is where the book becomes very interesting and enlightening for anyone with a penchant for post-war blues. Guy relates the time when he wound up at the club 708—where Otis Rush was just killing with his inspired guitar and vocal abilities. Rush told Guy to get up on stage and play—and Guy—being slightly drunk—launched into a fiery version of "The Things I Used To Do". It's here that Guy talks about how he literally felt the spirit of Guitar Slim enter his soul, as Rush and the crowd watched Guy's performance. But Guy writes about this entire period with a kind of awe, which you feel as you read his description of his early days scuffling in the blues clubs that dotted Chicago. This is also the period when Guy met Muddy Waters ("You a farm boy?"), and decided to make Chicago his home. There's several stories Guy talks about here, like when he nervously meets B.B. King, who advised Guy to use flat picks when he plays—something Guy does to this day. This highly interesting period continues with Guy describing the rough and tumble world found in the small clubs throughout Chicago. He writes about the time a man came into a bar with a paper bag, complaining about his wife. When the bartender reached inside the bag, he found the severed head of the man's wife. But this same tale is told by Mike Bloomfield (in another book) with slight variations, and Charlie Musselwhite has heard this same story from several people over the years (all slightly different), and considers it a folk tale—but who really knows? Or the time Guy witnessed an ice pick being driven into a man's neck. These "incidents" (true or not) still bring into sharp focus a world most (if not all) of us will never witness—a world where you had to prove yourself. And while this atmosphere shocked Guy, he gives the impression that that was just the rough, cold world where he played his music—and

thankfully survived. I have no doubts that "things" went on known only to the people in that part of town. This is certainly one of the more riveting parts of the book-where outsiders weren't really welcomed-and it usually took an "insider" to vouch for you until you could prove that you "belonged". But Guy continues his blues apprenticeship-witnessing Little Walter, Elmore James, Sonny Boy Williamson, and others playing the blues. But a chapter is reserved for Guy's most famous "partner", Junior Wells. Guy writes with some reverence about Wells-even though they sometimes didn't get along. This (short) chapter is another interesting firsthand account of what happened with Wells and Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, and the "Blue Mondays" era at Theresas lounge. Family life was also important to Guy-who married and fathered several children. He talks about the difficulties of making enough money to support his family-driving a tow truck by day, and playing in the clubs at night. It was during this period (1960's) when Guy begins to notice white fans in the crowd-two being Paul Butterfield and Mike Bloomfield. Guy writes about how he is still indebted to both American and English musicians from that era, who popularized the blues for everyone. He also mentions his trip to Africa-playing for the infamous Idi Amin, and his adventures on the Festival Express Tour of Canada, with Janis Joplin and many other bands. Throughout this section of the book, Guy talks about his recording (beginning in the 50's) for the Cobra, Chess, and Vanguard labels-sometimes (early on) with the great Willie Dixon. He mentions the tragedy at Alpine Valley-with the death of Stevie Ray Vaughan, and what a loss that was. He writes a few words on winning several Grammys, and his ever-growing, all important family. But all the above are just a few of the exciting periods that Guy describes in this great little book. No doubt you will find other parts of Guy's life just as interesting. The book effectively ends like it began-with Guy sitting in his blues club, Legends, taking things easy. This entertaining, informative, inside look at "When I Left Home" is well worth reading for any fan of Guy or post-war blues. Buddy Guy is one of the last bluesmen from a unique era, playing in this musical style-a style that's rapidly disappearing. While other blues artists coming up have their time in the spotlight, it's people like Buddy Guy who really represent the blues. Read this book and you'll begin to understand why.

The blues have always been by my side. I will hunt out and read any all biographies of these great men and women who have brought this music to life. Some are good, some are not. When I saw this book offered, I had no choice but order it right away. I could not put it down. Thank you Buddy for keeping the blues alive and for telling your story. The flavor and feel is so personal and rich. Buddy takes us on a ride through the cotton fields of Louisiana to the streets of Chicago and beyond. I heard Buddy play many times, live....Records could never capture the energy Buddy gave

out in a live performance, especially when he was with his soul brother Junior Wells. There would be no Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, or any of those so called guitar gods if it had not been for Buddy Guy. But today Buddy's time has come, respect at last; the respect he deserves as a master of the blues. He stands next to giants like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Lightning Hopkins and so many others who never got the respect they deserved. Buddy speaks not just for himself, but for all the blues men and women who came before him.

A couple of pre-review statements and disclaimers: First... I am a fanatical electric blues fan... and I absolutely love Buddy Guy... and I firmly believe that he is the greatest living electric-blues-man. Second: I take great pride in the integrity of all my reviews and I would never... ever... falsely "tilt" a review simply because I like the artist. My love for Buddy Guy the entertainer has absolutely no impact on the rating of my review. The only thing my love for Buddy did... was make me buy this book to begin with... after that... it will stand on its own. I never forget that the review I write can influence whether a potential buyer will spend their money on this book. And I always hope that the person that writes the reviews I read... weigh heavy in their soul... that people like me decide whether to invest their money and valuable time on a book they review. Now to the review... This is a tremendously entertaining and enlightening biography of a true American original... Buddy Guy. The reader is taken from Buddy's impoverished early life as the son of a Louisiana sheer cropper... all the way to becoming an international blues sensation... that not only played with the likes of the Rolling Stones... but was offered multiple contracts from the Beatles... and becoming idolized... by the likes of Eric Clapton... and innumerable other famous guitarists... and as engrossing as this purely American rags to riches story is... from picking cotton as a child... to being almost adopted by the infamous Muddy Waters... when this naïf ve and wet- behind-the-ears guitar player ventured from the cotton fields in the deep south... to the rough and tumble streets of Chicago... and everything in between and after... the reader is bestowed with what can only... in retrospect... be described as... not only the "icing-on-the-cake"... but the luscious "cherry-on-top"... the entire story is written in Buddy's "native" tongue. If you've ever seen Buddy interviewed... he is a raconteur's... raconteur. And that is exactly the way the writing is transferred from Buddy's mouth... to the page... to the reader. By the time you're done with this blues classic of a book... your inner voice is talking to yourself in Buddy's cadence and style. Mr. Guy pulls no punches about his dreams on the way to Chicago... and to his fears and hunger (literally)... when the reality of urban Chicago became a daily battle. Buddy may have been singing the blues in Louisiana and on his way to Chicago... but when he got there... he not only had the blues... he was living it. If you are a real historical-blues fan like I

am... this book gets an A+ in this area and won't disappoint. All the big (or not so big... but famous within the blues community) electric blues names are intertwined in Buddy's story. GUITAR SLIM...(who Buddy patterned his wild acrobatics and showmanship after)... B.B. KING... MUDDY WATERS... T-BONE WALKER... LIGHTNIN' SLIM... OTIS RUSH... MAGIC SAM... FREDDIE KING... SONNY BOY... HOWLIN' WOLF... LITTLE WALTER... BIG BILL BROONZY... JOSH WHITE... LONNIE JOHNSON... WILLIE DIXON... ALBERT KING... SONNY TERRY... BIG MAMA THORNTON... JOHN LEE HOOKER (Note: There are some absolutely-unbelievable-funny stories regarding Big Mama and John Lee... that only Buddy could do justice to!)... PAUL BUTTERFIELD... MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD... STEVE MILLER... ELVIN BISHOP... JIMI HENDRIX... JANIS JOPLIN... TINA TURNER... ETTA JAMES... RAY CHARLES... and so many more. You'll also learn, almost step by step, how these early artists were literally robbed of their royalties by the likes of Leonard Chess and others. The rise and fall of Buddy and blood brother Junior Wells is heartbreakin... and yet... unfortunately what the blues are all about. The duality of Buddy's inner being and life experience... runs the gamut from being a witness to women being beaten... to knives being brandished (including partner Junior Wells being knifed in the back by a jealous married woman who he was involved with)... guns being used... drugs and alcohol abused to the extreme... to babies out of wedlock... And yet... like the extreme of a placid ocean compared to a tsunami... Buddy was blessed with beautiful loving parents who he idolized... and provided early direction regarding hard work... music... religion... and life lessons he carries with him to this day. There's also the touchstone of emotional and historical importance when Buddy and his Dad stood in the backyard of a white man listening to the radio broadcast of Jackie Robinson playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers. When Buddy describes the day his very special friend Stevie Ray Vaughan died... and his subsequent recording of an emotional personal instrumental tribute to Stevie entitled "REMEMBERIN' STEVIE"... a potential reader should clearly understand this is a brilliant... cover-all-the-bases... life story. And although this is obviously a rough-and-tumble-pull-no-punches... story of the real blues... perhaps the most touching part of the entire book... which will clearly convey to readers that want to know Buddy Guy the human being better... is the simple-yet-powerful sentence beneath a picture of Buddy's Father... ***MY BELOVED FATHER***

I pre-purchased this book for my Kindle, and was so happy when it arrived. Of all the biographies I've read recently, this is my favorite. I hated to see it end. I especially like the conversational style -- it was like he was talking directly to me. I was struck by his passion and desire to become such a

great musician, and by the family love and support he shared. Thanks for all the great memories, the inspiring story ... and all that wonderful music! Lyn

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