



Blood, Bone, and Marrow: A Biography of Harry Crews

By Ted Geltner

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In 2010, Ted Geltner drove to Gainesville, Florida, to pay a visit to Harry Crews and ask the legendary author if he would be willing to be the subject of a literary biography. His health rapidly deteriorating, Crews told Geltner he was on board and would even sit for interviews and tell his stories one last time. “Ask me anything you want, bud,” Crews said. “But you’d better do it quick.”

The result is *Blood, Bone, and Marrow*, the first full-length biography of one of the most unlikely figures in twentieth-century American literature, a writer who emerged from a dirt-poor South Georgia tenant farm and went on to create a singularly unique voice of fiction. With books such as *Scar Lover*, *Body*, and *Naked in Garden Hills*, Crews opened a new window into southern life, focusing his lens on the poor and disenfranchised, the people who skinned the hogs and tended the fields, the “grits,” as Crews affectionately called his characters and himself. He lived by a code of his own design, flouting authority and baring his soul, and the stories of his whiskey-and-blood-soaked lifestyle created a myth to match any of his fictional creations. His outlaw life, his distinctive voice and the context in which he lived combine to form the elements of a singularly compelling narrative about an underappreciated literary treasure.

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Editorial Review

Review

A lean and pleasingly consumable book . . . Harry Crews led a big, strange, sad and somehow very American life. It is well told here.

(Dwight Garner *New York Times*)

Does real justice to a complicated, outsized literary figure . . . Trying to separate the conjoined twins of Harry Crews, the shit-kicking, vodka-swilling legend, and Harry Crews, the person, is a delicate, messy operation. *Blood, Bone, and Marrow* manages to do it without either dying on the table. (Margaret Eby *New Republic*)

Geltner brilliantly renders the life of the late writer Harry Crews (1935-2012) in this well-researched and vivid biography. It captures the wild spirit of an unflinching American writer. . . (*Publishers Weekly* (starred review))

Harry Crews was a uniquely gifted and haunted storyteller. Novelist, journalist, memoirist?he made each form his own in a way no one else had before or since. The pages that follow in this absorbing biography detail this and reach into the guts of the experiences that formed him and gave him a voice that was sad, brutal, and funny. Harry said that when it came to writing the truth about himself?or anything for that matter?he was not as interested in facts as he was in memory and belief. (Michael Connelly, from the foreword)

An absorbing but sad chronicle of a tormented writer. (*Kirkus Reviews*)

In *Blood, Bone, and Marrow* Ted Geltner gives us a fast-paced narrative of the crazy, violent, tragic, and memorable life of Harry Crews. Geltner knew Crews and produces a book worthy of its subject. This is an excellent first-wave biography that will be a joy to all Harry Crews fans and will be an invaluable resource for scholars and enthusiasts alike. (Taylor Hagood *author of Faulkner, Writer of Disability*)

With the power of a spellbinding storyteller, Geltner splendidly captures Crews' blood, bone and marrow by leading us on a journey through all we need of Crews' hell, recognizing that without passing through this hellacious suffering, we can never truly understand him. Geltner's biography compels us to seek out Crews' novels to read, or re-read, and to discover the voices of a South just off the interstates and at the edges of its glittering urban centers. (*BookPage*)

Geltner maintains a warm relationship with his subject, allowing Crews' irreverent, raunchy, no-holds-barred personality to swagger forth in delightfully uncensored remarks and observations, many of them unprintable. We see the faces of the demons that compelled him through Geltner's careful anatomy of their origins: the poisonous beginnings, the death of Crews' first son by drowning, and the lifelong, 'relentless feelings of inferiority' that no success could check. (Gina Webb *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

Blood, Bone and Marrow offers a compelling, often funny and frequently sad account of a deeply flawed and yet profoundly influential American writer. Harry Crews toiled his whole life against the cards life had dealt

him and he went to his grave without knowing the answer to one of the most fundamental of life's questions: Who is my daddy? What blood runs through these veins? . . . The epigraph of the book's final chapter is a quote from Crews himself: 'The big oaks have to fall down so the little oaks can grow up. And now it's my turn to go down.' Harry Crews was a big oak, one of the biggest, and in my mind he'll never go down. (Guy Salvidge *Wrapped Up In Books*)

Harry Crews was a brilliant, maddening, hell-roaring personality who also happened to be a great writer. *Blood, Bone and Marrow* will stand as the definitive Crews biography. His true life was bigger and wilder than even his own novels. (Carl Hiaasen)

About the Author

Ted Geltner is an associate professor of journalism at Valdosta State University, adviser to the campus newspaper, and author of *Last King of the Sports Page: The Life and Career of Jim Murray*. He worked for seventeen years as a writer and editor at a number of newspapers, including the *Gainesville Sun*, the *Scranton Times-Tribune* and the *Ocala Star-Banner*.

Users Review

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