

# **Broken Summers Study Guide**

## **Broken Summers by Henry Rollins**

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## Plot Summary

Broken Summers follows the Rollins Band and Henry Rollins through the end of one tour and a period of time spent in L.A.. It includes the time span of developing the new album of Black Flag and the performances and subsequent tour to benefit the West Memphis Three. The West Memphis Three consists of three teenagers who were arrested and probably wrongly convicted of the murders of three second-grade boys in Memphis, and there is strong evidence that the West Memphis Three were railroaded by a community that was horrified and wanted to pin the crime on someone. When Henry Rollins takes up their cause, he devotes himself to spreading awareness and confronting the injustice of their imprisonment using the music, community, and music industry knowledge he gained from his years as a front man for Black Flag.

In the first section of Broken Summers, Henry Rollins is simply describing life on the road in a punk band. The scenes go from day to day, and Rollins sets up a dichotomy between life on the road, which is fulfilling and life in L.A., where there is nothing to do and no purpose to his activities. When the tour ends, and Rollins is back in the office all day every day, he is antsy and uncomfortable, and when he hears from Lorri Davis about Damien Echols and the West Memphis Three, he feels compelled to do something to help. He gets his band members on board and then starts to call in guest vocalists to record an album of Black Flag covers to benefit the West Memphis Three. He wants to help the defense pay for DNA testing of material that was not tested originally, which might prove that the West Memphis Three were innocent.

This cause turns into a series of concerts that are well received, and then Rollins takes his band on the road with the songs, and performs them in the U.S., Europe, and Australia. While he was only a Black Flag singer for a short time, and traveling now with his own band, the feedback he gets from the audience and from other musicians indicates that he carries the spirit of the original band. Reports keep coming back that Greg Ginn, who is also still playing Black Flag songs, no longer has the passion or the intensity to keep those songs alive, and this feeds Henry Rollins' philosophy of confrontation and aggression, intensity and focus. Rollins is not a drug-addicted or alcoholic rocker: he believes in keeping himself and his music pure, so he uses weightlifting and music to feed his aggression and keep him alive with resentment of an 'Amerikan' culture that he says is shallow and empty and weak. With music that is full of aggression, and with a workout routine that keeps him pumped and strong, he proves to his audience and to society that he still has "it" and that music matters because the experiences that it expresses, matter.



# Pages 1 - 25

## Pages 1 - 25 Summary and Analysis

Henry's 97-year-old neighbor dies, and the woman's granddaughter comes to Henry's gate, asking for Valium. This makes Henry Rollins think about permanence and death, and it makes him anxious to leave L.A., where he has no sense of attachment to things. He recalls Big John Macias facing down a cop who told them to leave a restaurant, and he recalls a few other venues where he saw bands he liked. In spite of his memories, he has only used L.A. as a "twenty-year location to store my stuff in between tours" (p. 3).

Rollins says that bootlegs allow him to listen back through time to a live event, and he says that there is a difference between U2 and 'rock' and real music that keeps people alive. Rollins says that he is starting to prepare for tour, after playing the part of a serial killer in a film. He says that he is preparing for tour because it will be a test, to be with the band and roadies in a bus with all their gear.

Rollins says that he has no desire for a relationship with a woman, and speculates on the reason for this, but he says that "the road is the truth" and playing music gets to the heart of it (p. 6). Rollins says that he has been watching a documentary on the Cold War, and he says that American racism disgusts him.

2002. Rollins says that the band has begun to practice in advance of concerts. In anticipation of going on the road, he says that he gets nostalgic and fears his own weakness and sentimentality. He says that he admires the male prostitutes who are out in the cold every morning, selling themselves. He says that he likes L.A. because it keeps him mad. Like Iggy Pop, he says that you have to work to keep the rage, to keep seeing clearly.

As he prepares for tour, his house sitter tells him that he surprised a half-dressed woman in Henry Rollins' place, but Henry Rollins was in Milan on the night in question.

Henry Rollins picks up again in advance of the show in Belfast, then after the show, when he says that living on the road makes him feel more alive, less bogged down with material possessions. He presents his lifestyle as a quasi-religious devotion to experience itself.

Rollins describes the 'classic drunk' who comes to performances and tells him repeatedly that he loves him. He says that the show he played in Dublin was "full-on" and "real" (p. 18). He says that the show in Cork was a good one as well, and between the sleeplessness and the raw accommodations, he feels very satisfied with his life.

After injuring himself and chipping a tooth at the Cork show, Henry Rollins and his band take a ferry and drive to Glasgow. Rollins says that he is reading Kapuchinski's "Imperium," studying up about the inhumanity of the previous century, when off-hand comments could get you sent to prison for years. Rollins says that he read O Magazine



and Rosie Magazine on his day off, and he says that he prefers O to Rosie. He then mocks Rosie O'Donnell and Michael Jackson, riffing on their vulnerabilities. He does the same about Hitler and Raquel Welch.

Henry Rollins takes a blustery tone, carrying the reader through a whirlwind of thoughts and impressions. When his thoughts alight, they are centered on his disdain for American commercial culture, and for the passivity of the American masses. He also has contempt for Stalin and the violence of the 20th century—both themes send him back to his central interest: his own freedom, and the sensation of being alive, living an on-the-road, stripped-down lifestyle with just a duffel bag and a backpack of gear. He idealizes the male prostitutes who let it all hang out on the side of the street in the mornings, they're 'core,' which we take to mean hard-core, committed and fully alive.



# Pages 25-51

## Pages 25-51 Summary and Analysis

Rollins says that he does not want to talk to people, and resents being asked for autographs, and involved in fans' lives. He says that he might be a "real human being" (p. 27) again after he comes back from tour, but it is going to take a while. Rollins says that he wants to keep his brain active, and not let it get lazy, and relationships interfere with his ability to provide "absolute integrity of delivery" (p. 29).

Rollins notes that his friend Deirdre O'Donoghue died a year ago in 2001, and his reminiscence of his dead friends prompts him to say that he doesn't want to get close to people, it is so hard to lose them.

Henry Rollins complains about the constant interruptions from press and crew before the show in Moscow. He says that he can't prepare for the show. In St. Petersburg, security is provided by soldiers, and they take away one of the audience members who tried to cross the barricade. At the next Petersburg show, he says "No barricade so they were all over me as soon as I got anywhere near them. Pounding my legs, hitting me on the head and grabbing my free hand. It was never antagonistic, they just wanted to say hi" (p. 35).

Rollins describes the kinds of inane questions people ask him, then describes a speech Bill Clinton gave, which he found inspiring. He complains about the lack of energy in the bands he sees on MTV, and says that "well adjusted people shouldn't make music" (p. 38). "Art is supposed to wreck you," he says. "It's only for the strong" (p. 41).

Rollins says that he has played some of the same venues in Scandinavia before, and recounts his experiences with fans: he has entered the 'small box mindset' that comes from being on tour. Walking around a gas station, he realizes that "I had all I needed out here. A show every night and a bunk to sleep in" (p. 44).

Rollins elaborates on his resistance to human interactions, and defends his solitude and the purity that comes from the small box mindset of living within the bubble of the tour, with its discipline and rigor and exhaustion. Through Barcelona, Madrid, Switzerland, Croatia, Italy, Austria and Hungary, he is worn down by the tour, but he says that he is getting something out of each show in advance of returning to the U.S. at the end of February 2002.

Rollins' narrative is largely centered on his own feelings and actions, without any description of his band-mates or prominent people in his life. He is a solitary person who "knows" and his knowledge has kept him apart from society, and made human connections almost painful in their intensity. He does not speak about any romantic attachments or characters in his life, only the tour, his feelings about Amerika, and his impressions about how each show went. He is primarily interested in justifying his sense



of exceptionalism—he is the one who brings it, hits it, gets it done, he's the one who is real, devoted, alive. Opposed to these values are the lame bands in the mainstream, the movies, and most of American popular/consumer culture. These two sets of qualities do not seem to be slated for any kind of reconciliation or confrontation or crisis—Henry Rollins seems to be just recounting his impressions and thoughts during the tour.



# Summary and Analysis for Pages 51-80

## Summary and Analysis for Pages 51-80 Summary and Analysis

Rollins says that his parents divorced in Washington D.C., and he remembers their custody fights and other bad memories. He says that with Ian MacKaye, he went to Yesterday and Today Records in Rockville, MD, where he used to buy punk records as a kid. Now that Rollins is back from tour, he is dour about Amerika, and he is critical of the excesses and overdone people and stores.

The band plays in Boston and Buffalo, then Chicago before Henry Rollins returns to L.A. Rollins wonders whether the tour is reality or whether it is a way for him to avoid reality, but he says that he prefers the drive and focus of being on tour to the "vast amounts of pissed off that accumulate" when he is at home in L.A (p. 56).

Rollins gets a letter from Damien Echols' wife Lorri Davis, explaining the West Memphis Three's situation. He says that he gets a letter from a friend of a friend who had died. The friend is sending his friend's letters and the journal entries about him, and he says that he reads them with great sadness before he stops reading altogether. Rollins' friend was one of the only people who was caring toward him, and he says that he is usually uncomfortable when people care for him. He prefers the rigorous life, steeling himself and controlling his emotions. He thinks about fleeing to an isolated place in order to hide below the world's radar.

At a benefit concert for the West Memphis Three, the mixing board blows out and the show is cancelled, but when Rollins tells the crowd, they are not upset. He thinks about F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose writing he prefers to Hemingway. He says that he identifies with the tragic characters in Fitzgerald's stories, and likes that Fitzgerald is an incurable romantic.

Rollins says that he wakes up in the middle of the night in a sweat, afraid that he is doing everything wrong; he says that he never feels this on tour. He has been reading and rereading Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Thomas Wolfe, as well as a biography of Max Perkins, their editor. He describes the famous people he would like to meet, and says that writing is a bad job, as most writers are completely mean people.

Stressed out by living in L.A. again, Henry Rollins has the idea to do a benefit album of Black Flag songs for the West Memphis Three. He gets his band together, and then starts making calls to get a recording venue and then singers. He wants to make the album a genuine piece of art, a slice of life, a living thing, real and genuine. He knows that there will be critics attacking the project, so he says that he needs to make it as real as possible.





Having seen the movie *Paradise Lost II: Revelations*, he starts to draw singers into the project, and he is surprised and gratified when different singers sign on. He lands some big names from the world of punk rock, including Iggy Pop, Keith Morris, Ian MacKaye. He starts recording the music for the album and lays the tracks in two days of hard work, after spending one day driving a jeep for a film that is not related to the work for the West Memphis Three.

Now that the music is laid down, Henry Rollins involves more singers, including Hank Williams III, Corey of Slipknot and Jim from Pennywise. He says that each of them lays down vocals that blow him away.

Henry Rollins devotes a lot of his commentary on asserting how real his music is, and justifying the emotional expense of removing any distractions from his life and cutting down on relationships. He justifies this by the genuineness of the music, and the focus and rigor it takes to keep it sharp. He does concede, in these journal entries, that he feels lonely sometimes, or weak, but he does not allow these misgivings much space before he suppresses them, and reasserts the value of hardcore music and the discipline of being on tour.



## Pages 80-110

### Pages 80-110 Summary and Analysis

As more singers sign on, particularly Tom Araya from Slayer, Rollins says that the project is bulletproof, now. Cedric of The Mars Volta signs on, as does Inger Lorre from the Nymphs and Exene Cervenka, as well as Nick and Josh from Queens of the Stone Age. Lemmy Kilmister signs on, and Rollins says that he is 'on Lemmy watch,' waiting till Lemmy surfaces from tour. Rollins says that Lemmy goes straight to the liquor when they bring him into the studio, he records his track, and takes Rollins back to this apartment, which is cluttered and overflowing with World War II artifacts and empty liquor bottles. Rollins says that he feels lightweight next to Lemmy, who was one of the originals in Motorhead.

Kira comes in to lay some tracks, and Rollins says that he sings a duet with Exene Cervenka. Rollins says that he keeps himself sharp with aggression and confrontation, so this cause for the West Memphis Three is perfect for him. Chuck Dukowski, one of the original members of Black Flag, comes in to do vocals, and Keith phones in, so there is something of a reunion.

When Henry Rollins hears that Dee Dee Ramone has died at 50, he recalls having spent time with Dee Dee in 1993 in New York. Dee Dee had asked Henry Rollins to read his autobiography, and when Rollins showed up to read it, Dee Dee asked him to come with him to a meeting with a literary agent. Dee Dee was nervous about the meeting, but Rollins says that he held him together, and talked for him all through the meeting. The friendship developed, but one night Dee Dee renounce Rollins, and left him an insulting message, which ended their friendship for the time. Rollins says that he found out later that this was just standard fare with Dee Dee Ramone.

When MTV does a piece on the benefit album, Henry Rollins rails against "Empty TV" and advises the reader to know what kind of pricks they are dealing with, since the world is full of them. He reiterates his faith in the value of conflict.

As the benefit album wraps up, Rollins admits that the work he's been doing takes a lot out of him, and he has been losing weight and not sleeping. In a note that fills a four month gap in the journal entries, Rollins says that the band is booked to play songs from the benefit album at Amoeba in L.A. He says that he has been working out in preparation for the rigor of touring, which takes more out of him as he gets older.

The concert at the Amoeba and another at the Ventura raise \$10,000 for the West Memphis Three, and Rollins says that he is glad to know that the money might pay for DNA testing, which could be pivotal in getting the boys out of prison.



On a plane to Brisbane, Australia, Rollins says that he thought he should start another tour with songs from the Rise Above benefit album, and his band is into it, so they start scheduling dates.

As the band comes together at a recording studio with engineers and personnel to make a benefit record of Black Flag covers, the West Memphis Three work takes more and more of Rollins' time, and becomes more and more satisfying. He realizes that the cause is a controversial one, but he feels convinced that there have been errors in the legal process, and that justice would be served by DNA testing on the crime scene evidence. His ability to draw people into the album and then the tour says a lot about his status among the other musicians, and the respect he has for justice.

Henry Rollins has a dark side, though, which is threatened by the lack of focus of daily living. He thrives on tour and intensity, and finds traffic and people difficult. He does give this trait thought but not too much analysis, and he returns again and again to his philosophy of rigor, confrontation, aggression. His recollection of Dee Dee Ramone is equivocal as well, as he obviously felt a certain affection for the man and his work, and he is upset by his death, although even here, he returns to his philosophy of rigor, and says that the man wasn't enough to keep his work going.



# Pages 111-150

## Pages 111-150 Summary and Analysis

Henry Rollins includes the press release he sent out for the Rollins Band's tour with the Black Flag benefit album for the West Memphis Three. From Lorri Davis, he gets Damien's copy of Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, and he wonders how incarcerated people deal with time dragging on and on.

Working in the office, Rollins answers letters and misses being on tour. He is still reading on F. Scott Fitzgerald, now Brucoli's Fitzgerald and Hemingway, and he concludes that "people like me will always live alone" (p. 130), although someone stops him in traffic and shows him a tattoo of "Rollins" on his arm.

Henry includes his newsletter to his fans, which says that he is grateful that his fans keep coming out to the shows. He says that he has started working on the West Memphis Three project, and that Keith Morris will be joining him on the road. He asks his fans to come to the shows. He says that the band is "a trained assault unit" (p. 132) and he promises to "f\*\*k you up with this music." (p. 133). He deplores the cowards who are standing in the way of the show in Memphis, and he looks forward to confronting them. Rollins is disappointed that even people in the hardcore punk world are lame and cowardly. He resents people's lame requests.

Rollins learns that June Carter died, and he remembers her fondly, but he says that he knows too many dead people, and he resents Dennis Cole cashing in on his son's murder and having a drinking problem. Rollins is reading Palast's book "The Best Democracy Money Can Buy" and he is critical of the American trend of buying elections like Bush did in 2000.

Rollins recalls another dead friend, Malcom Owen, who OD'ed on heroin in 1980, but he says that their songs are still alive and meaningful.

Tim Spencer of Rock 103 invites Henry Rollins on his show, and says that he'll open the phone lines and let Rollins talk to the people whose children died, but Rollins writes to Spencer to say that he is only interested in the facts, and that Spencer might be interested in the facts as well, and he acknowledges that the parents must live in hell with their children murdered.

A man tries to break into Rollins' house, but Rollins is at home, and catches him. In the mail, he gets a portrait of the Bhodi Dharma that Damien had painted entirely with coffee. He says that in rehearsal, Keith Morris shows up and nails it "he doesn't have to turn anything on, he just walks in with it. Some people have it." (p. 144).

Rollins says that Amerika is weak and lame, and he recalls Janis Joplin's death, and he says that he can't imagine Joplin or Hendrix at 60, because L.A. is too screwed up and



unreal for that kind of passion to survive. He rails against the traffic and people in their cars clogging everything up.

Tim Spencer writes back, and says that the West Memphis Three people have been really negative, and he looks forward to Rollins' appearance. When Rollins learns that the show in Memphis has only sold 41 tickets, management puts out a call for help, and Rollins says that "it is definitely time to do records at home and sell them to your friends and not bother with the lightweights" (p. 148).

Rollins meets the press for some interviews about the upcoming tour, and then the tour gets under way.

This section portrays Henry Rollins at his least comfortable. He is in between recording and touring, and he is caught up with the 'lightweights' in the entertainment business, trying to stir up support for an unpopular cause, and irritated about the volume of traffic and stupidity he encounters in 'Amerika.' He is obviously most at home in the intensity of touring, and he begins counting down the days till he can tour again. He describes touring as a deployment, and the metaphor of battle is always behind his writing. It is therefore interesting to see the dedication and care with which he writes to Tim Spencer, when you would expect him to just go off on the DJ. He and Spencer have a very measured correspondence over a volatile topic, and the reader gets to see a more patient side of Rollins than Rollins otherwise presents.



# Pages 151 - 189

## Pages 151 - 189 Summary and Analysis

Rollins' tour opens in Fort Worth TX, where the opening band has brought all kinds of 'merch' to the show. Rollins says that for these guys, "the show they were there to perform was the formality they had to get through so they could get back to their normal, lounging bullshit. Either live for it or f\*\*k off" (p. 151). He says that his interview with Spencer went well, since Spencer was 'on top of it.' He says that TV interviewers are so adjusted to the sound byte that it's impossible to talk to them.

Supafuzz opens for the Rollins Band in Memphis, and Rollins says that he is surprised by the level of support for the West Memphis Three and this tour. Rollins says that before the show, he talked to Pam Hobbs, the mother of one of the murdered boys. Hobbs was with Shawn Wheeler, who spouted off all the facts that led the police to the West Memphis Three, but Rollins says that Wheeler was suspicious, and that he had discredited himself in a number of ways. Rollins says that he spoke to a bunch of people who knew Damien and the others, and they say that they were just kids who listened to music and wouldn't hurt anyone.

Rollins says that some people are apathetic about the cause, but Bubba the Love Sponge, a DJ in Florida whom Rollins has known for years, is supportive. Rollins says that he spoke to a cop who told him that 'don't move the body' is crime scene 101, and there were a lot of problems with how the murders were investigated.

Rollins complains about the drunk people who surround the shows, and he says that his number one rule is not to bore people. He says that he watched a show on forced confessions, and he remembers being questioned after Joe Cole's murder, how people were quick to blame him just because Joe had bought a copy of Mein Kampf out of curiosity.

Rollins says that he can't believe Condoleeza Rice is on TV spinning away the Bush administration's cowardly dealings in Iraq. He says that he likes working every day for the West Memphis Three, it gives him a vacation from himself.

The Rollins Band plays in Orlando and Savannah, then has a day off before playing in Charlotte. He says that Q and not U opens for them, and he says that they have a good sound, and that their label is putting out good music. Ian MacKaye joins Rollins, and Rollins says that he thinks back to their childhood and trying to get into shows when they didn't have money.

In Norfolk and then in NYC, the show continues, and Rollins says that he resents Humvees, and he entertains the possibility of vandalizing them, to make it unappealing to Hummer drivers.



Rollins recounts a strange experience with Springa from SS Decontrol, who approached him before the show, asking for free tickets, but Rollins never saw him again. He says that he sees MSNBC's Joe Scarborough in military gear, and emails him to ask when he was ever in the military, and then Waleed Rashidi interviews him about the band and Greg Ginn's upcoming show. This stirs up some controversy about the distinction between the Rollins Band doing Black Flag songs, and Rollins' relation to Black Flag 'proper.' Rollins says that he gets a letter from a fan who had seen Greg Ginn's Black Flag show, and he says that it's 'HORRIBLE.'

When there is no opening band in Cleveland, Rollins says that Clear Channel owns so many venues, and they don't care about the music or the people, they only care about the profit, but he says that the crowd that shows up "never disappoints" (p. 172).

Rollins says that he is irritated by the fact that there is no opening band again in Columbus, OH, but he says that he does not take this kind of thing personally. In Detroit, he complains about the drunks after the show. When people are coming in and out of the backstage area in Detroit, Rollins says that "it's hard for me to be around people who are not intense and professional when it's time to do a show" (p. 175).

Rollins is irritated again when there isn't an opening band in Chicago. He says that there are plenty of bands who could have played. Rollins says that he cannot take credit for the Black Flag songs he is singing, it was all Greg and Chuck.

Rollins says that he likes listening to Katrina vanden Heuvel debate Pat Buchanan, coming at him hard and fast with facts. He rails against racists like Pat Buchanan, who don't treat people like they're equal, just like they're all white. He says that he can't imagine buying a house with money that came from selling the government 200,000 gas masks, and suggests that a war tariff would end war altogether.

Thinking about the phonies and their military scams, Rollins returns to his philosophy of "higher consciousness through harder contact." (p. 180). He says that the show in Minneapolis is one for the record books, it was so hot, and the Salt Lake City show was hot as well, they played in a basement and it rocked. Rollins says that they finished the U.S. part of the tour in Boise and then Seattle, Portland and San Francisco. When he recalls playing in the same venue on the day Timothy McVeigh was executed, Rollins says that he doesn't think "you can pretend to lead the world and still have sanctioned murder" even though Timothy McVeigh did kill 168 people (p. 186).

Recounting the last of the U.S. tour, Rollins says that Jello Biafra from Dead Kennedys played with the band, and pulled the winning ticket for the raffle of the Dan Armstrong guitar. He says that Jello tells him about his legal woes with the Dead Kennedys, and Rollins says that he advises Jello to just walk away, instead of being consumed with legal issues.

As the tour gets under way, Rollins says that the shows rock, and every night, he says that the audience rocked and the music is really great. He talks with Pam Hobbs and finds her friend a blowhard who is not worth listening to, and he keeps his focus on the



shows and the music and what they are there for: raising consciousness and money for the West Memphis Three. Drunks and lightweights continue to irritate him, and feed his anger with weak people. Jello Biafra's story about his legal issues makes him restate his philosophy of keeping things simple and letting stupid people have their way without fighting them, although he is of course confrontational as much as possible. There are definite rules that govern Rollins' aggression, for he won't put himself in a position where he could be taken in for fighting or assault, he just puts it all into his music and his workouts, and keeps cool as much as possible the rest of the time.





# Pages 190 - 210

## Pages 190 - 210 Summary and Analysis

Arriving in Europe for tour, Rollins says that Keith Morris has left, and now Rollins will be singing Keith's part of the set. The band plays in Austria and Serbia, and Rollins says that he likes playing in Eastern Europe. The band plays a festival, but Rollins says that he does not like playing festivals, or hanging out with musicians, since they are "some of the dullest, most self-involved morons I have ever met" (p. 192). He says that Europeans rock like there's no tomorrow.

Rollins notices the 'afterburn of totalitarian oppression' everywhere in Serbia and Hungary, and on their way to a press conference, they end up getting out to walk when soldiers want to search the van. In Germany, Rollins says that music is a timeline for him, as certain songs are associated with certain times, and some albums he listens to all the time, they're like a part of him. "A lot of the time, records are better company than people." (p. 195).

When Rollins gets hit with two cups of beer on stage in Germany, he throws his water bottles into the audience, and he says that he doesn't care who he hits, but he has to hit back so everyone knows where he stands on the issue.

Rollins worries that the tour and the album won't ultimately help the West Memphis Three, and that "ignorance, fear and basic stupidity win in the end" (p. 196). He sees value in the shows themselves, though, and in the cause, so he plows ahead nonetheless. "Sometimes it's hard to take but it keeps me mean and ramming my shoulder into it." (p. 196).

Rollins says that he has opportunities to fight in London, and in Frankfurt, but the other guys always back down. He says that "contrary to urban legend, I am not homosexual, just a low-key heterosexual" (p. 198). He says that he does interviews for the West Memphis Three and another with a fashion magazine. He says that he saw TV Smith and Gay Advert after the show, and he describes TV Smith's lyrics as genius.

At the show in Liverpool, someone punches Brian, and Brian leaps into the audience to fight the guy, and when she same guy tries to pull Rollins into the crowd, and Rollins says that he punches him in the face. The guy never shows up after the show to fight further. "Some nights," he says, "the only thing that got in the way of a good show is the audience" (p. 200).

The band plays in Dour, Belgium at a festival and then in Hamburg, where Rollins says that he confronts the band Yo La Tengo over comments they make about the Rollins Band's show. The tour is starting to wear on Rollins, and the repetitive shows are rewarding and also draining. Rollins says that he can't believe Bush has the chutzpah to put Marines in battle, and then spend his vacation time in Africa, petting an elephant.



In Finland, Rollins says that he meets a fellow who has written about Joey Ramone. After their show in Copenhagen, the Rollins Band flies to Australia, where there are only six shows left in the tour. During a layover in Bangkok, Rollins says that he always thinks of this as the perfect place to get away from everyone, and shut himself off, just pay attention to the things around him. He talks about a book by Jim Corbett, a lion hunter who didn't enjoy hunting the lions, but killed them to keep them from eating people in the villages in India.

Jet lag is a problem for Rollins in Australia, where the time is completely opposite American time. As the end of the tour approaches, Rollins says that he is not looking forward to returning to the U.S., where there is only traffic and work in the office. Exhaustion is hitting Rollins because they are doing a long set now, with an eight-song encore, making thirty songs total.

The band's final show is in Japan. Rollins says that he sees Mick Geyer again, and trades books with him. He says that he read a lot about South Africa and apartheid, which complemented his reading on Russia and the gulags. After the show, which he powers through on momentum and protein bars, Rollins says that he hits the record stores in Shinjuku, where he stocks up on bootlegs of King Crimson's 1974 shows. At the last show, Rollins says that he is hit with beer early on, and then some oppressive guys are making the show irritating for him, so he hurls a water battle at one of them and the bottle breaks on the guy. The moment made everyone cheer, and the show went crazy after that.

Back in L.A., Rollins says that he feels "post-tour heartbreak...There's no duty here. No mission. No standard" (p. 223). He feels like he is in a Joan Didion book, disaffected and wrong. He rants about the people on 'cel phones' and the people in traffic, and he says that he looks forward to a time when the land reclaims the things people have built on it.

In an epilogue, Rollins says that someone realized his hopes of vandalizing a Hummer dealership, lighting Hummers on fire and spray painting others. Lorri Davis writes to him to say that Damien has been moved to a supermax facility, and now she only wants to fight harder for him.

Greg Ginn has planned a 'first four years' show of Black Flag's music, but Rollins says that there are all kinds of problems and rumors about who will be playing. Greg Ginn seems to be in it alone, as Chuck Dukowski is not invited, and Keith Morris says that he will not be involved. Mike Vallely, a skateboarder and punk rocker, says that Greg Ginn is hungry for profit with these shows, and Rollins seems to be pleased by the contrast between his versions of the Black Flag songs and Greg Ginn's attempts to put a concert together. In the end, he prints a letter from Ben Edge, saying that Greg Ginn's show was terrible, with a machine playing the bass lines, and no real passion, just one song after another with 2-3 second intervals. Ben Edge says that the crowd was hostile to the band, throwing things and cursing at them, and he says that what he saw on stage was not Black Flag.



The book ends almost randomly, without any closure. The Rollins Band's involvement with the West Memphis Three will continue, and the manuscript will be handed off for print.

The book ends after the tour winds down, and Rollins returns to the L.A. he feels disconnected from. He has played his heart out, and the fans have rewarded him with great shows and a lot of support. It is still not clear—the book was published before the West Memphis Three were freed from jail—about how that case will turn out, so Rollins' account is incomplete. His best effort will have to be enough.

Considering his philosophy of leaving the petty things alone, and keeping track of the most important things, his lack of a complete ending is right in line with Rollins' values. The long letter from Ben Edge is a powerful way for Rollins to indicate the legitimacy of his own efforts ad Greg Ginn's expense, but if the letter is to be trusted and trust seems to be one of the things Rollins is intent on preserving the Ginn show was terrible because of flaws Rollins would not have allowed into the plans.



# Characters

## Henry Rollins

Henry Rollins is the forty-one year old singer and front man for the Rollins Band. He was the fourth singer for Black Flag, with Greg Ginn and Chuck Dukowski, and he is someone who values music and the intensity of experiences he has through his music, more than anything else. He organizes his life around being on tour, counting down to the next show, and hitting it as hard as possible every night. He does not have many friendships, and his experiences with women are thin to non-existent, but he takes a great deal of pride from being associated with genuineness and intensity and refusal to back down.

## Big John Macias

Henry recalls Big John Macias facing down a cop at Oki Dogs, after the cop told him and Henry to leave.

## Deirdre O'Donoghue

Deirdre O'Donoghue was a friend of Henry Rollins' ever since she interviewed him on her radio show at KCRW in 1983. She died in 2001 in January, and Henry Rollins marks her passing by remembering their friendship in Santa Monica.

## Keith Morris

Keith Morris is one of the first singers for Black Flag. He joins the Rollins Band on the Rise Above tour, and sings the first songs before Henry Rollins finishes the set.

## Chuck Dukowski

Chuck Dukowski is one of the original members of Black Flag. He and Greg Ginn started the band, before Henry Rollins stepped in as their fourth lead singer, on the strength of an impromptu appearance and audition. Chuck is supportive of the Rollins Band's recording and tour, and he is contrasted with Greg Ginn, who is not.

## Mick Geyer

Mick Geyer is a friend of Rollins' who talks with him about literature and philosophy and the world. They hang out twice in Broken Summers, and talk in long conversations



about everything. Geyer recommends books for Rollins, and movies. The last time they see each other is in Japan, after Melbourne, Australia.

## **Tim Spencer**

Tim Spencer is a DJ in Memphis who interviews Henry Rollins about the West Memphis Three and their support for DNA testing. Henry Rollins expects the interview to be confrontational, but he comes out believing that Spencer is a good guy who is up on his facts.

## **Greg Ginn**

Greg Ginn is one of the original members of Black Flag, with Chuck Dukowski. He and Chuck wrote the songs, and then brought in Keith and Henry Rollins and other singers. Ginn is not entirely comfortable with Henry Rollins' role in the Black Flag tour for the West Memphis Three, and it does not seem that the two men like each other much, but there is not much actual friction between them either. Rollins does include long letters that are critical of Ginn's shows.

## **Mike Curtis**

Mike Curtis is the tour manager for Black Flag, and he purchases the Dan Armstrong guitar that is sold to raise money for the West Memphis Three. He offers to raffle it in turn, so that the guitar can make even more money on tour.

## **Damien Echols**

Damien Echols is one of the West Memphis Three, who have been imprisoned for the murder of three second grade boys in Memphis. There is significant doubt about whether these boys were imprisoned correctly, or whether they were railroaded in a rush to judgment. Damien is the only one of the three boys on death row, and Rollins has more to do with him and his wife, Lorri Davis, than with the other two boys. By the time Rollins gets interested in their case, the boys have been in prison for ten years.

## **Lorri Davis**

Lorri Davis is Damien Echols' wife. She has quit her job in New York to marry Damien, who is on Death Row all that time. Lorri is the one who contacts Rollins in the beginning, launching Rollins' efforts to rescue the West Memphis Three.



# Objects/Places

## Los Angeles

Rollins says that L.A. "isn't a town you live in - just one you live through" (p. 6). This is where he keeps his things between tours.

## Black Flag

Black Flag is the rock band in which Henry Rollins was a lead singer. The band was originally formed with Chuck Dukowski and Greg Ginn, with singers and drummers rotating through. The band is reconstituted by Greg Ginn after Henry Rollins does his Rise Above tour, but the reviews of Ginn's efforts are highly critical, and the mantle of Black Flag's energy and purpose seems to have passed, in Rollins' account, to Rollins and his supporters.

## Oki Dogs

Oki Dogs is was an outdoor diner where Henry Rollins and Mugger would try to scam free food.

## Amerika

Henry Rollins spells America with a K to designate his distrust and dissatisfaction with the American lifestyle of corporate comforts, McDonald's and Julia Roberts films. He is opposed to the military-industrial complex and the complacency it creates in people.

## Death Row™

When he talks about the West Memphis Three, Henry Rollins describes Death Row with a ™ symbol to describe the corporate reality behind the American government. This is in line with his rebellions against everything collective and senseless - everything that is not individual life and freedom.



# Themes

## The purity of life on the road

Henry Rollins really values the tension and aggression and focus and purity of life on tour. He feels compelled to prove something to the crowd and society by 'hitting it' every night when he gives a show. He almost seems to suggest that he would stake his life on his performances, considering how much he gives to them, and this sense of ultimate performance and ultimate sacrifice pervades *Broken Summers*.

The focus of life on the road is juxtaposed and contrasted with life in L.A., and even just nights off, on tour, when there is nothing to do, no reason to live, and nothing to organize Rollins' feelings and activities. While the shows use every last ounce of his personality, the days off and the periods of time between tours don't touch him, and he complains about the emptiness of 'Amerikan' consumer culture, and the congestion of life in traffic, dealing with weaklings and stupid people. Living the life he does, Rollins criticizes people who do not live intensely, although he seems to be content with his fans and the band members. He does not seek out girlfriends to share his intensity with. He says that he misses people too much, and missing them makes him soft on the road, when he wants to be focused.

## The solitude of the artist

Rollins says that he is not interested in relationships, and at forty-one years old, he knows so many people who have died that he is a bit averse to relationships that will make him rely on other people, or miss them when he is traveling. Surrounded as he is by music industry critics and businessmen, Rollins says that it is best to let those people alone, and keep to himself. He has a deeper and more beneficial relationship with his collection of music than he does with people themselves, and he says that he prefers records to human company. While Rollins does mention a number of fellow musicians - typically people whose work he admires - he does not 'dish' about other celebrities. He talks about people he admires, and sometimes names the names of people whose behavior or whose values he condemns, but he does not involve himself with people very much. Even his band mates do not come up in very much detail, although one could imagine that Rollins is giving them their privacy by not including much about their lives or he is a complete introvert who keeps to himself at all times. Nevertheless, Rollins himself raises the question of his lack of involvement with other people throughout the book, and the repetition of the question is itself an indication that Rollins might like a better answer than he has—or at least that he has to reassert the need to be alone.



## The deaths of friends

Throughout *Broken Summers*, Rollins says that he knows too many dead people, and at forty-one, he is a rarity among musicians. He talks about Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, in addition to a number of punk artists who died of overdoses or a friend who died of a mysterious disease. Rollins' affection for these people is so strong, and his grief for their deaths is so strong, that he keeps from getting to know people for fear that he might have to miss them when he is not with them.

At the same time that Rollins seems to idolize the artists who died young, he himself is still going strong, and while he is sensitive to the accusation that he is getting older, and while he can see that performing is taking more and more out of him, so that he has to work harder and harder to stay in shape to perform, he is also one of the people who is still performing, keeping the music alive and aligning himself with the original vision in the music, which is the vision of confrontation and aggression, calling people out to stand up and be alive to their lives and feelings, instead of being deadened by a shallow modern society.

## Justice for the West Memphis Three

When Henry Rollins hears from Lorri Davis about her husband Damien Echols and the other two men who have been imprisoned for a crime they did not commit, Rollins rallies to their cause, and pulls together some concerts and then a recording date. He gets singers involved in making covers of Black Flag songs, and sells the CD as a benefit for the West Memphis Three's legal costs. The effort galvanizes Rollins, and pushes him to give an enormous effort to the three kids who have spent ten years, by the time of his writing, in jail for a crime they likely did not commit. Interestingly, Rollins is least confrontational in some of his dealings with the West Memphis Three issue, as he sends Tim Spencer at Rock 103 a very civil letter about DNA testing, and he talks with Pam Hobbs and her friend without making a big confrontation and media drama. Nevertheless, his commitment to the cause is as straightforward as it can be, considering that he is a musician who does not know the boys personally, but he rises to the challenge of the injustice anyway. If he wonders whether his efforts will be effective, it only makes him give more effective and compelling in his concerts.



# Style

## Perspective

Rollins' point of view is informed by hardcore punk rock. He values loud, hard, technically intense music, which makes him feel organized inside, galvanized, and motivated. Rollins was the fourth singer for Black Flag, and he seems to be sensitive to the fact that he had not created the Black Flag songs themselves, but he knows that he is the most intense singer who has ever come to these songs, and he is reassured by the fans' letters, which he includes, comparing him favorably to Greg Ginn, one of the founders of Black Flag.

## Tone

Rollins' language is straightforward and simple, with strong appeal of call-it-like-it-is style and rough profanity-laced rants. Rollins cultivates an authorial persona that is interested only in essentials, and he keeps his interests close to home. He abstracts a Spartan philosophy from his day-to-day activities and the focus and aggression he needs to keep himself going on tour. His language is often consistent, as he exalts certain values, and decries certain flaws in people's personalities or in the government. Rollins extends himself, a little, to rant about the government, since this is a bit removed from his day-to-day life, but he is not nationalistic in his criticisms of the Bush government.

## Structure

Broken Summers is structured as a journal Henry Rollins is keeping from 2002 through 2003. The entries are typically made after a concert, on the bus en route to another show. He spends some time in between tours in L.A., and then the entries are made at the end of a day in the office, or at the end of a workout. The book is roughly broken in two large sections: the first is the Rollins Band tour that ends in March 2002. Rollins returns to L.A. and conceives the idea of a benefit concert, then album, then tour for the West Memphis Three. From this point, the book gathers momentum as Rollins assembles his team and organizes the tour, then plays through the shows. The book does not resolve the 'plot' of this project, since it was published before the West Memphis Three's sentences were commuted to time actually served and their convictions were reduced to a technicality.



## Quotes

"L.A. is a strange place to call home. I can't do it. I drive the streets and see places I've been in the past and there's no feeling of nostalgia. IT all feels rented here. It feels like a mouthful of dirt" (p. 1).

"Look at what the masses are into. They line up to eat at McDonalds. They read corny drugstore books and watch Julia Roberts films. Their tastes can't be taken seriously. I fear them for sure. I fear being trapped by their mediocrity and low-level ignorance" (p. 4).

"I am not remotely interested in knowing someone intimately or being known intimately. Don't know, don't want to know" (p. 5).

"Isn't it in your best interest, if you are committed to playing music live nightly, to eliminate any obstacles that lessen your potential for absolute integrity of delivery" (p. 29).

"The more I focus and the more things I go without, the better I am for the shows" (p. 41).

"Let's not bullshit here, the main appeal of the life out here [on tour] is the low responsibility factor. I know it. It's hassle free and not real. It's a temporary break from the day-to-day of real life" (p. 44.)

"Functioning in the middle of all this blanched earth and smog, I constantly think of two environments: the first is a small piece of land with a lake and no people. The other is a small, hot room in some corner of Indonesia. Either way it's a solo invisibility trip" (p. 59).

In Thus Spake Zarathustra, Nietzsche advised the warrior to favor the short peace over the long, and to make his peace a means to new wars. That's the thing keeping my stitching in at this point" (p. 144).

"Higher consciousness through harder contact is better than what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" (p. 180).

"I'm fine as long as I remember the fact that there's only the work and the application and the duty to it. What someone else thinks of it is quite peripheral and totally inessential to the work itself and to let any of their puny squeaks divert the shot is to filthify what is initially pure" (p. 181).

"It's dangerous to define your life by such fleeting instances. You can't hold onto them, it would be like trapping bugs in a jar - they just die" (p. 221).



## Topics for Discussion

Rollins says that he is at war. What is he at war with? How does he conduct his war? What outcome does he expect? How does the thing Henry Rollins is at war with fight back?

What is the difference between good discomfort, which makes Henry Rollins feel alive, and bad discomfort, which makes him unhappy? What are the qualities that make discomfort an appealing virtue, and how does Henry Rollins develop a theory of existence around the appeal of discomfort?

Is *Broken Summers* an American book? What makes it American, and what makes it anti-American? How does your definition of America differ from his?

How do you resolve the contradiction between the sometimes-violent music and rants and resistance to American culture, on one hand, and Henry Rollins' appreciation of Bill Clinton's speech, which seemed to put progress within reach? Are these two separate Henry Rollinses, or can these traits be reconciled as one philosophy?

Henry Rollins says that "art is supposed to wreck you. It's only for the strong" (p. 41). What are the obstacles to him making art, and how does he keep himself 'strong' for the art? What sacrifices does he make? What sacrifices does he keep having to make? What part of him wants to be soft, and what does he do about that?

Is touring a real experience for Henry Rollins, or is it, as he says, "Solitude disguised as a sense of individuality" (p. 48).

When Henry Rollins says that the tour is grinding on him and his band mates, he says that "Hey, we're in Italy, how bad can it be" (p. 49). What is it about Italy (or anywhere where Rollins goes on tour) that makes it justify the sacrifices and exhaustion?

Henry Rollins says that "well adjusted people shouldn't make music" and he also says that "I know things" and that "the facts keep me on my own." What are the things Rollins knows, and why does this make him a candidate to make music, in his own terms? Debate the proposition that only damaged people can make good music or art.