

Cash: The Autobiography Study Guide

Cash: The Autobiography by Johnny Cash

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Plot Summary

Johnny Cash was born in Dyess, Arkansas. Born as the Great Depression is winding down, Johnny recalls his father doing whatever he could to make a living - including chasing any rumor of a job by hopping a freight train. He moved to Kingsland with his parents when he was very young to a communal farming project put in place by the government. The family includes Johnny's older brother, Jack, to whom Johnny is devoted. One particular day, Jack seems to feel a reluctance to go to his job operating a saw, but citing the family's need for the money, goes anyway. Johnny's father comes to get him later that day, saying that Jack had been injured. Jack dies a few days later and his death greatly impacts the family. Johnny says that it's a statement of the unforgiving situation that means his mother - still grieving for her son - is back in the cotton fields the day after Jack's funeral.

Johnny's mother always says that he has a gift and encourages his music though his father believes it to be a waste of time. Johnny goes to Germany for a stint in the military and returns with plans to marry a woman he'd written to over the years away from the states. They marry and have four children, though the marriage is soon in trouble, at least partly because his wife has seen the attitudes of the women who follow the stars and partly because Johnny is on a downward spiral of drug use. Johnny is enamored with June Carter and they eventually marry. There is one son born of that marriage, John Carter Cash.

Johnny tells the stories of excitement on the road. He worked with many other up-and-coming young music people including Elvis, Jerry Lee and Carl Perkins. The demands of the road are Johnny's first excuses for using drugs and the downward spiral of abuse is soon a major part of his life. When he is confronted by his entire family, he agrees to go for treatment at the Betty Ford Clinic but says that the recovery is extended and that he returns to use this and other facilities over the coming years.

By the 1990s, Johnny could retire but says he doesn't want to. He continues to travel, makes another album that focuses solely on his voice and his own acoustic guitar, and finds time for family and friends. He talks at length about the people, including those who die. Luther Perkins, a member of Johnny's original band, was one of those and Johnny cites the tragic loss of Roy Orbison's wife and then later his two children. There are several near-misses in his own life, including health problems and accidents. As he brings his thoughts to a close, Johnny says that he hopes he doesn't disappoint the fans though they are sure to notice that he has aged. Johnny says that his hope - and that of all performers, is that he will die on stage, in the midst of a favorite song and surrounded by family and members of the band while the drummer, Fluke, continues to lay down a rhythm.



Cinnamon Hill

Cinnamon Hill Summary and Analysis

The story opens from Johnny Cash's home in Jamaica where he is when he begins writing this autobiography. He says that his family originated in Scotland where the motto of their coat of arms was, "Better Times Will Come." The family settled in America in 1667 and his ancestors moved on to the south with some fighting the Confederate War and eventually settling in Arkansas. Johnny's grandfather was a traveling preacher and his youngest son, Ray Cash, was the last child at home after his father's death. Ray continued to care for Johnny's mother until her death then joined the army, eventually fighting in Mexico. Ray married Carrie Rivers in 1920 and Johnny is their fourth child, born in 1932.

Johnny says that his father, trying to raise a family through the rigors of the Great Depression, does the best he can for his family. This sometimes means hopping a train to chase any rumor of work. Johnny says that he grew up in Kingsland, Arkansas, and that his home in Jamaica reminds him of that childhood home in many ways that are important to him. One of these ways is the fact that he can drive to the local market for vine-fresh tomatoes and that the seasons bring specific changes, such as the level of water in a nearby waterfall.

Chapter two begins with Johnny saying that he's not certain there is a place in 1990s America where a young boy could set out with a fishing pole, spend a whole day alone, and there'd be no need for anyone to fear for his safety or to wonder what he was doing. He uses that to move on to the question of what is meant by the term "country." He says that he's often been denied that title but says those who say he isn't country don't even know what it is. Johnny then questions whether the way of life that spawned country music still exists and whether it has now responsible for producing the lifestyle that includes pickup trucks, honky-tonks and boots.

The family then moves to Dyess Colony from Kingsland in 1934 into a government community farming project. The house is new, includes a smokehouse, outhouse and two porches, and seems to Johnny like a mansion. Johnny talks at length about the work of the cotton fields. He says that it was a lot of backbreaking work, that he was working in the fields by the time he was about eight, and that his father had a great deal of good sense about the right way to use the land to get the most out of it. However, there are some things that can't be helped: the weather, the flooding of the nearby Mississippi River, and the invasion of army worms one year. The song "Three Feet High and Rising" comes from an experience on the farm. Johnny says that it wasn't all unpleasant and that he can remember the beauty of the cotton fields just coming to bloom. While the blooms are very young, Johnny likes to eat them and his mother always warns that he'll get a stomach ache. He says he never remembers having gotten a stomach ache from eating the cotton.



In chapter three, Johnny describes the smokehouse where meat was cured regularly. In 1944, Johnny's older brother Jack, fourteen, is his hero. Johnny says that Jack has announced his intention to be a preacher and he is serious and steady so that no one doubts it. One Saturday Jack heads off to his job sawing lumber though he says he doesn't want to go. Later, Johnny, who has been fishing, encounters his father who says Jack has been hurt. Ray takes Johnny into the smokehouse and shows him Jack's bloodied clothes. Jack has been cut from ribs to groin but he lingers in the hospital for several days, even seeming to rally for a while before succumbing to intestinal poisoning. Johnny says that Jack's influence has remained constant and that he's often considered what Jack would have done to know what is right, even when he didn't follow the same path himself.

In chapter four, Johnny describes a robbery at his Jamaican home on Cinnamon Hill in 1994. He says that the three young men terrorize his family for two hours, lock them in the basement and leave with all the cash and jewelry they can find. Johnny says that the Jamaican police were quick and brutal in their response and that all three of the young men were later killed, one resisting arrest and two others in an escape attempt. He says that it took some time to find peace with the realization that he had essentially had something to do with the deaths of the three but that his eventual resolution is to remain at the home that he loves in Jamaica and to hire guards from a private company to keep vigil over his property.

Johnny gives a rather fast overview of his life, including the fact that he married Vivial Liberto of San Antonio, Texas, when Johnny is twenty-two. They couple has four daughters but the marriage doesn't last and Johnny later marries June Carter who had two daughters of her own at the time of the marriage. They have a son together. John works as a salesman, a laborer in an auto factory and serves a period of time in Germany. He runs through his record label affiliations, various songs that helped put him on the road to stardom, and the awards that include elections to the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. He also briefly touches on his additions. The majority of these will be discussed in greater depth later in the book.

The first chapter also includes a great deal of self-examination. Johnny says that he is grateful for many things, including family, friends, health and the lack of an all-consuming love of cars that has cost many of his friends a great deal of money. An interesting point is that he says he's glad he isn't ugly. Johnny doesn't seem to referring to outer beauty as much as to inner beauty, and refers to "ugly souls."

Johnny warns that it's a natural tendency to romanticize things but warns against doing that in the case of the rural life lived by the Cash family and others like them. As an example, he points out that the day after Jack's funeral, the entire family is back in the fields, chopping cotton. When Carrie, Johnny's mother, falls to her knees, Ray takes her arm but she pushes him away. Johnny says that the picture of a bereaved mother on her knees in the mud should eliminate the romantic notions.



The Road

The Road Summary and Analysis

In chapter one of "The Road," Johnny talks about the sameness of the road and that he likes to think of the young musician just working to learn about the travels. His own bus is called Unit One and Johnny says that he is comfortable there. On a particular day, he's traveling toward northern California and thinks about a particular song segment before his thoughts turn to Pete Barnhill, Johnny's friend when Johnny is thirteen. Pete is a victim of polio and one arm and leg are underdeveloped. Johnny says other children make fun of him but Johnny admires his musical talent. Johnny himself inherited his love of music from his mother and she from her father, John L. Rivers. Johnny says that his mother believes in his gift while his father believes Johnny's love of music a waste of time. Both attitudes, according to Johnny, helped spur him to success. For a short time, Carrie takes in a school teacher's laundry to earn the money for voice lessons for Johnny but the teacher tells him after only three lessons that he must not let anyone change his singing. He says that he wishes he'd learned more about how to protect his voice but never returned for more lessons. Then his voice alters with puberty and he has new, deeper ranges. He says that his mother reminds him often that his voice is a gift of God.

In chapter two, Johnny is in San Francisco in the middle of a tour. He says that he's done an interview and that there are three questions that always arise: Why was he in prison, how does he write a song, and why does he always wear black. Johnny says that he was never in prison, a fact that some people seem unwilling or unable to believe. He says there's no "formula" for his songwriting and that he finds method and inspiration in various places. Finally, he says that this song, "Man in Black," written in 1971, describes his reason for wearing black, though he admits that it was initially because the small band he had could not afford a uniform and black shirts and blue jeans were all they had in common to wear on those first performances. Later, as described by the song, he wears black for "the poor, the beaten down, the sick and lonely old, the prison who has long paid for his crimes," and more. But Johnny says that the bottom line is that "it feels right" to wear black.

In chapter three, Johnny describes an incident in which a young person stands in front of his bus, the Unit One, and forces a brief altercation with the driver. Johnny says he never drives the bus and has learned to stay out of sight when there's any kind of problem with fans. On this particular night, he has his band with him on Unit One to work on a song, "Rusty Cage." He then turns his thoughts to 1955 when "Cry, Cry, Cry" is a hit and he and his band are performing regularly on the Louisiana Hayride, a show similar to the Grand Ole Opry but not as prestigious. After his release from the air force, he moves his young family to Memphis, Tennessee, where he lands a job as a salesman though he is terrible at it. Johnny with the band that would later be known as "The Tennessee Two" travels wherever they can find a place to perform. It's through



Johnny's brother Roy that Johnny, Luther and Marshall meet up and begin performing together.

Johnny tries several times to get an interview with the head of Sun Records, Sam Phillips, who declines to interview Johnny as a gospel singer and later as a country singer. Johnny then goes to the studio and waits for Phillips, who grants an interview based on Johnny's tenacity and self-confidence. He invites Johnny back with his band to sing "Hey Porter," and then announces that he'll release it as a record if Johnny can come up with a second song, and he writes, "Cry, Cry, Cry" for that record.

Chapter four is dedicated to Johnny's thoughts on Sam Phillips (that Phillips might have done him wrong but that he also gave him help when he needed it) and the fact that the business side of music always seems to take away from what he loves - making music.

In chapter five, Johnny talks about his good friend and neighbor Roy Orbison. Roy loses his wife to a motorcycle accident and later two of his children to a house fire. Johnny seems to admire Roy for his ability to get past that time in his life and to live again. Roy and Johnny make a pact shortly before Roy's death to grow their hair long enough for a pony tail. Though Johnny "chickens out," he sees that Roy in his coffin has done it. Johnny and June buy the property where the burned-out house has been and later deeds it back to one of Roy's surviving children, Wesley. In chapter six, Johnny says that he misses Roy and how they often shared breakfast at Johnny's house. He says that the singers who shared the Sun label, including Roy, Jerry Lee, Carl Perkins and Elvis, have only minor disagreements. Among the most common is Jerry Lee preaching at the rest and predicting that the musicians are leading their fans to hell. There seems to be only a little competitiveness between them as well and Johnny says that this was mostly because of Jerry Lee's need for "supremacy." Elvis tends to captivate the audience and his fellow musicians though Johnny remembers one show in which the fans continue to cry out for Carl to the point that Elvis gives up the stage after only two songs. Carl, having grown up in Lake City, Tennessee, has a similar background to Johnny and the two are immediately close. Johnny tells Carl about an incident in which a fellow military recruit had pointed out his military-issue shoes, said that on this night when they were all going out the shoes were "blue suede," and warned Johnny not to step on them. Johnny says he believes there's a song in that story and Carl takes it and runs with it, though the result is not what Johnny had imagined. He says that Carl later has an accident that costs him a great deal of time during a period when Carl was on the upswing, but that Johnny believes Carl would never have been the singer Elvis turned out to be, even without that accident.

In chapter seven, Johnny talks about other friends, including Johnny Horton who had been married to the widow of the Hank Williams. He says that Horton has a premonition of his own death and asks that Johnny look after his girls just a few weeks before dying in a head-on collision. In chapter eight, Johnny reverts back to the present, saying that they've completed another show and that he's exhausted. He recalls a studio session that happened by chance with Johnny, Carl, Jerry Lee and Elvis. Johnny says he'd never heard Jerry Lee on the piano until then and he's so caught up in it that he doesn't realize when Elvis leaves. Johnny then talks about Luther Moore Perkins. He says



Luther wasn't an excellent guitarist and usually took a long time to learn a new song, but then never forgot it and never varied his part at all. Luther dies after having suffered excessive smoke inhalation in a fire at his home on Old Hickory Lake.

In chapter nine, Johnny talks about Marty Stuart who had played in his band for several years and who had taken his own time about setting out on his own. Johnny praises Marty's talent and says he went out on his own with Johnny's blessing. After Luther's death, Bob Wooton takes over the guitar role and once when Bob is sick, Waylon Jennings takes his place in Johnny's show though Johnny had been reluctant to allow Waylon to play this minor role in his show.

In chapter ten, Johnny recalls advice from Ernest Tubb who'd said, "The higher up the ladder you get, the brighter your ass shines." Johnny is preparing for another show and knows his fever and congestion isn't going to let him go on. He says the news is filled with details of Faron Young's death and he recalls an incident in which Johnny told Faron that God would "jerk the tongue out of your head." When Faron has a wreck, his tongue is cut badly and Johnny goes to visit him in the hospital. Johnny says that he walks up to Faron's bed and challenges him to say, "shit." The words Faron does say are muffled by gauze and packing, but Johnny says he feels confident that the last word is "you."

Johnny describes a deep camaraderie between the young performers of the 1950s. He says that there were many who went on to be big names and that they all had affection for each other, despite the fact that they tended to know each other only on a superficial level. Johnny goes on to say that it's a "corny" thing to say, but that they were all connected so that they shared the triumphs and hurts of each as if it were their own.

Johnny talks about his feelings looking back at the early days with his band members. He says that he is limited by the backup of Luther and Marshall because their music knowledge is limited, as is his own. He says that he found it easier to simply continue to sing what he knows they as a group can perform rather than looking for a way to help them grow in their musical abilities. As an example of this, Johnny says that Kris Kristofferson offered Johnny's group the song, "City of New Orleans," but that he turned it down rather than trying to make the group rise to the song. This may seem a strange attitude for a man who clearly made a success of his life as a musician, but Johnny seems to be his own biggest critic. He does complete this line of thought by saying that he'd been "honest" in their performances, and that he believes that accounts for something.

Johnny admits to giving "terrible advice" on several occasions. In the case of Roy Orbison, he'd told Roy to "change your name and lower your voice." He says that this is "fairly typical" of his grasp of what will make a hit and what the fans will like. The sarcasm here is fairly evident and Johnny seems to have the ability to laugh at his own mistakes.



Port Richey

Port Richey Summary and Analysis

Chapter one of Port Richey begins with a story of Johnny's friends gathering to spread Faron Young's ashes in accordance with his wishes. He says that a gust of wind blows the ashes back onto the mourners and even the cars. Port Richey is the home of June's parents, Mabelle and Ezra Carter. Many of the furnishings are as Maybelle and Ezra left them. About a mile from their house in Port Arthur is the Carter Family Fold, built to be a performance center. Johnny says that many of them have performed there and that he has the distinction of being the only person allowed to use amplifiers. Johnny first encountered the Carters in 1972 as they were recording in "an improvised studio in Bristol, Tennessee." He says their music filled the region and that they're more important than most people realize or give credit for. Johnny cites the fact that the members of the family always worked together and that June and her sisters - though each talented in their own right - were never willing to take a contract without at least consulting the others. Johnny says that the family had been "on the road forever," performing since they were very young, and that they each could handle any part he put to them. Johnny says that he enjoyed fishing with Maybelle and that he admires the fact that she is "a worm baiter." Maybelle ends her career by choice because of her fear that her Parkinson's disease will make her make a mistake with her music. She dies on October 23, 1978. Johnny ends the chapter by saying that Maybelle and Ezra played important roles in his battle with addiction.

In chapter two, Johnny recalls having a broken rib as a child and the impact morphine had on him, though it was years before he recalled - and desired - that feeling again. Johnny says that fall into addiction is subtle and that he soon finds that he's out of control though he refuses to admit it. Johnny talks about his marriage to Vivian. He says they carry on a correspondence while he was in Germany and marry when he returns to the states. She supports his plan to sing but comes to hate the idea when she sees the girls hanging around others of the stars, including Elvis. Johnny says that he takes more pills which makes Vivian urge him not to take them, which makes him take more and avoid returning home so that he doesn't have to fight with his wife.

In chapter three, Johnny describes a camper he has named Jesse, after Jesse James. He says that he often slips away in that camper, remaining away from home for days at a time when he was not on tour. Once, the oil leaks from the bearing of the camper and catches fire, starting a wild fire. On another occasion, Johnny has a bottle of propane gas which rolls around in the trunk of his Cadillac and blows up. He escapes with his life but is burned so severely that the pregnant wife of a friend who come to visit takes one horrified look at him and miscarries. Johnny says that it could be said that his "hell-bent" way of life at this point in time may seem amusing, but that he can't stop thinking that the baby was too young to die.



In chapter four, Johnny says that he was wild when he was young, and that it was mostly because of the drinking and drugs. He says that vandalizing motel rooms later became a normal part of the rebellion of an up-and-coming rock star. Johnny has a new manager, Saul Holiff, and it's he who puts Johnny and June together in a show in 1961. Johnny says that he tells her during that show that "you and I are going to get married someday," and that June laughs and says she "can't wait." Johnny later asks for her to remain with his show fulltime and she agrees. During one of their first show dates, June demands that Johnny give her his shirt, takes it and irons it, and he says this sets the tone of their entire relationship with her always taking care of him.

In chapter five, Johnny tells about some of the times when the drugs created serious problems in his career, including an interview with Mike Wallace just prior to a date at Carnegie Hall. When Wallace asks why Johnny chose that venue, Johnny snarls out a non-responsive answer. Johnny says there are many well-meaning friends who tell him that the drugs are out of control and that he's going to kill himself, but he responds that there are many things that will kill him and ignores them. It's during this time that he encounters a man named Ed McCurdy who sings Irish and Scottish folk music and who introduces Johnny to a Hopi Indian, Peter LaFarge, who is the inspiration for "Ira Hayes." Peter later dies of a drug overdose but that doesn't impress on Johnny that he might also be in trouble. Through all this, June - though married to someone else - remains at Johnny's side while on tours and continues to urge him to get control of his life.

In chapter six, Johnny's downward spiral continues and he plans to commit suicide by crawling into a cave so deeply that he can't find his way out. While there, he realizes that God still has a purpose and manages to find his way out. He says that when he emerges, June is waiting there with his mother though he'd known that June had been in California. At home, he begins the "drying out" process, which is painful and includes vivid hallucinations. In chapter seven, Johnny says that he has the opportunity for pain killers after several medical procedures, including after he'd been attacked by an ostrich on his farm, his stomach ripped and some ribs broken. Johnny says that he later has a serious infection in his hand that prompts a surgery, and while in for that procedure, it's discovered that he also has internal bleeding which prompts additional surgery. While he is recovering, the doctors grow concerned that he can't wake up and Johnny realizes that the valium he's hidden under the dressing of his stomach incision has been allowing Valium to dissolve into his system.

Johnny has hallucinations at the hospital and later the family gathers around him with a doctor who specializes in addictions, each of the family members telling him of his past actions while intoxicated that have hurt them. The exercise is aimed at making Johnny realize that he's also hurting himself and he says it's successful. He travels to the Betty Ford Clinic and notes that the celebrities there are given no leeway in the staff's demands for self-examination and recovery. Johnny says that it's an ongoing process, that he has to face his addiction at the beginning of each day in order to survive the day, and that he's used several facilities over the years to help him get back on track.

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Johnny talks at length about June's family, including the role her mother played in his battling addictions. He also talks about the fact that some people have told him that his time with the Carters limits his career but he says that he has learned much from them, that they've kept him grounded in the kind of music he loves, and that he believes Maybelle to be one of the most influential people in the country music genre. Johnny also comes to connect with June's father, Ezra. He says that they write regularly, often about poetry or theology, and that he respects Ezra's opinions. An important aspect of what Johnny seems to admire about Maybelle is that doesn't seem to realize the important role she and her family played in the industry. As an example of that importance, Johnny says that it was Maybelle who first used a melody on the top strings while playing a chord on the lower strings.

An interesting point is that Johnny says he and June have been in some rough financial situations and that they have, at times, considered selling off property, including the house at Port Richey, but that he never has, and that he's glad they've kept it in the family. This seems an impossible situation, that Johnny could ever have experienced financial trouble, but Johnny will later describe a situation in which he learns that his accountant had taken a great deal of money from him.



Bon Aqua

Bon Aqua Summary and Analysis

Johnny writes the first chapter of his next section from Bon Aqua. He says that he sometimes goes there to be alone, especially after touring. This is a piece of property that was purchased by Johnny's accountant with money he'd embezzled from Johnny's accounts. Johnny says he learns an important lesson about finding an accountant he can trust, and that he'd chosen not to prosecute the man. The property is named for a nearby spring and the land carries the legend of a soldier who had killed two Yankees threatening to requisition the man's cow which was necessary for his children.

In chapter two, Johnny talks about his recording success over the decades, saying that he'd been strong in the mid-1950s, had lost some of that in the early-1960s but had returned to the top by 1968, but had then come to a near-halt with the exception of a single hit - "One Piece at a Time" - in 1976. Johnny says that he studied the Western culture and later cuts the album that includes "Apache Tears," and "Ira Hayes" along with some other songs that, in Johnny's words, "pulled no punches." He says that he expected trouble and that there were some radio stations that refuse to play the songs. Johnny pitches the idea of a live concert album at a prison but his producers decline until Bob Johnston takes over that role.

In chapter three, Johnny recounts an incident in which he announces, as a lead-in to a gospel song on his ABC television show, that he is a Christian. He says he's warned that Christianity and network television does not mix. Johnny says he had received letters asking about his personal belief and that he felt he could not remain quiet but must make his profession of faith public. Johnny says that there are some who are turned off by his announcement and some religious groups that try to take advantage of it. Johnny says that there's no doubt that anyone with the understanding of God would willingly trade some record sales for eternal salvation. In chapter four, Johnny describes his meetings with several presidents, including Carter, Nixon, Reagan and Ford. Johnny says that all were charismatic and that it's no real surprise because that would be necessary in order to be elected president.

In chapter five, Johnny describes the whirlwind of his life, including series of live concerts, free concerts, tapings, guest performances and criticism for both his decisions to play in Vegas and in prisons, and for his previous addictions. In chapter six, Johnny explains the project, "Gospel Road," a video endeavor filmed in the Holy Land. Johnny says they film an enormous amount of footage and the majority of his crew volunteer their time for the project though he pays expenses. The result is a product circulated by Billy Graham. Johnny says that he also produces a book, "Man in White," as a direct result of his Bible study. That story, according to Johnny, is really a comparison of his own life to that of the Apostle Paul. He says the most important message for himself from this work is that God is always present, but only if he takes time to seek Him.



Chapter seven begins with Johnny saying that he and June are equal with regard to Biblical knowledge but that she is a "prayer warrior." He says the danger of being aware of that is that he sometimes feels he doesn't need to pray because June is praying enough for both of them. In chapter eight, Johnny is still at Bon Aqua and goes for a ride in his Range Rover. Johnny says that, at this point in his life, he could retire. He owns some property and has enough money that he doesn't have to work, but says that means that his entourage would no longer have a job and he doesn't want to do that. He ends by saying "Besides, I don't want to lounge around and get fat. The fun isn't over yet." In chapter nine, Johnny describes a long list of producers, including Jack Clement, who Johnny says has been a really good friend and an inspiration. Johnny says he then hit a "dry spell" where he had very limited success and no one was willing to put time, energy or money into promoting his recordings. Johnny, at a moment when he has no motivation and little hope of another successful record, insists on "Chicken in Black," dresses up like a chicken and records a video. His contract with CBS Nashville isn't renewed and Johnny says it's no surprise to him. Johnny tries some other avenues but in 1993, Rick Rubin shows up at one of Johnny's shows, suggests that Johnny produce a record with only his own voice and his own guitar - an idea that appeals to Johnny and had been turned down by other producers. The result is "American Recordings." He says he doesn't know what he'll do in the future but that there are some plans, including a recording from a cathedral.

In chapter ten, Johnny relates a near-death experience in 1988 when he'd heard the doctors warn that he was "slipping away" and had seen a bright, all-encompassing light, but had then been pulled back. He says he was initially sad but later was glad he hadn't died. He then lists members of his family tells stories and presents personality sketches of each: Roseanna Cash, Johnny's oldest and a singer in her own right; Roseanne's husband John Leventhal, musician and producer (Roseanne was previously married to Rodney Crowell); Carlene Carter, June's daughter and known to Johnny as "Sparkle" because of her personality; Kathy, Johnny's daughter who is married to Jimmy Tittle and has no show business ambitions; Cindy, Johnny's daughter who he describes as the tomboy who loves horses and fishing; Rosie, June's daughter who has an amazing voice and is regularly part of the show; Tara, Johnny's youngest daughter, absented herself from the family during the times of trouble but has returned to Johnny's life; John Carter, the only son of Johnny and June, who is a songwriter and travels sometimes with the show. There are also twelve grandchildren, Thomas, Carrie, Kacy, Aran, Jessica, Hannah, Caitlin, Dustin, Tiffany, John, Chelsea and Joseph.

Johnny seems to really enjoy the time he spends at Bon Aqua alone. He says that he can carry on conversations with himself, that he can cook for himself, and that he can wander the area, enjoying the quiet. This seems to be an important aspect of time off for Johnny in that he needs an opportunity to take a deep breath, move more slowly and return to a quieter way of life in order to recharge for the next round.

Johnny laughingly talks about June's excessive shopping. He says that she's got class and brains, but then switches from the intangibles to "she's got silver, she's got gold,"



and so on. He says that June will go off on a shopping trip and return with many purchases and show what great deals she's gotten, prompting Johnny to say that she's saved him a great deal of money over the years. Johnny then turns more serious, saying that she's put in as much work at the business as he and that he's happy to share everything with her. He also says that she is ultimately easy to live with and that he appreciates her for that.

Johnny talks about his father's profession of faith after Jack's death and seems to indicate that he isn't certain that the profession was real. He says that his father wasn't kind when Johnny was a youngster and that it was only later, when Ray was dying himself that he became a kind and caring person. Johnny says that his father once filled the pulpit in the absence of the preacher and that he tries to hold to that memory, but he seems to be bitter about his father. He tells the story of his father, drunk, fighting with his mother and of an instance when Ray killed Johnny's dog, saying that they have too many mouths to feed. Johnny makes a point to say that he doesn't carry the sins of his father, but he seems to be trying to convince himself of this. His mother is a different story and Johnny says that she manned a souvenir shop for many years, fulfilling the desire fans have for some level of personal contact.

Johnny seems very concerned about finding a way to make new records without losing his "old fans." He seems to worry about this almost to the point of obsession and says that he is skeptical of Rubin chiefly because this is the producer of some young artists, such as the Beasty Boys. But after he makes a comeback with the acoustic sounds, he is pleased to find that he's not lost his faithful following but has grabbed the attention of the youngsters. As an example, he relates the story of June who encounters a young fan "in tattered black, with tattoos and body piercings and spiky hair and the whole bit," who calls June "Mrs. Cash" and tells her that she "really kicks ass." Johnny says that he has referred back to that often, especially when June is down.



The Road Again

The Road Again Summary and Analysis

In chapter one, Johnny writes from Wisconsin and says that he is waiting for another concert and hopes that the fans will not be disappointed. Toward that end, he rests as much as he can prior to the show. He says that he hopes his final moments of life will be onstage, with his family and band at hand and "Fluke still laying down the beat." Johnny then says that he's going to start with "A" and tell his stories, hopefully at least to "Y" because he wants to include Trisha Yearwood. Those he tells stories about are Eddie Arnold who had the good fortune of releasing a string of number ones; John Anderson who is all country; Bobby Bare who is "a free spirit" and Bobby's friend; Shel Silverstein who wrote "A Boy Named Sue" which Johnny first performed at San Quentin and had to depend on notes because he didn't yet know the words; Owen Bradley, an important producer of the 1950s and '60s; Patsy Cline who once sent Johnny away from her door prompting him to never again "hit on her;" Ray Charles who Johnny says was a perfectionist but was never rude about it; and Conway Twitty who likes the same kind of music as Johnny. Johnny then turns the talk to the members of his band. There's W.S. Holland - or Fluke - on drums who has been with Johnny the longest; Bob Wooton on guitar and second in seniority to Fluke; Earl Pole Ball on keyboard who has been with Johnny two decades; and Dave Rorick on bass who in the newcomer with less than ten years with Johnny. Johnny then mentions the crew members who make the shows work and those who run the House of Cash, a studio, business office and home of the souvenir shop. Johnny goes on to talk about Dolly Parton, Porter Wagoner and Earl Scruggs.

Johnny says that the group, the Highwaymen, happened because he, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Kris Kristopherson got together for a show and that it worked out so well that they recorded a song by that name. Johnny says his greatest honor was his induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

In chapter two, Johnny recounts the travels after Wisconsin and tells more stories. He says that Alan Jackson is "a keeper;" that Roger Miller had once filled in for Johnny when Johnny was messed up on drugs; that Bill Monroe has the distinction of having created a new style of music; that Johnny Paycheck had once called himself Donny Young; That Ray Price had been vindicated for his choice to use a full orchestra in "For the Good Times" by a CMA award. He mentions others, including Linda Ronstadt, Tanya Tucker and Trisha Yearwood. He then turns his writing to some additional stories, including the time he, Maybelle and June had been forced to sing before they were allowed to cross the Polish border.

Johnny's first chapter of his last segment is very rambling as he seems to seek a way to include the names and some brief stories and information about every person he



considers important in his life that he hasn't mentioned up to this point. One of these is that he remembers his younger brother, Tommy, crying after Jack's funeral. He says that he'd really given no thought to the fact that Tommy is his brother, just as Jack had been, and that Tommy had suffered the same loss as Johnny and the rest of the family. Johnny drops right from this story to the story that he had once returned to Dyess to the old home place, and had been upset to see that the land itself had been altered.



Characters

Johnny Cash

Author of the story, Johnny is a singer and songwriter very popular throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s, though he himself says that he faded into obscurity in the 1980s only to make a comeback in the 1990s. He is called several names, including J.R. by a few of his friends, especially those who know him as a child and Johnny Cash to his fans. June calls him John except when he's "paranoid or belligerent," at which time she calls him "Cash." Johnny is, by his own admission, an egomaniac. He admits to battling addictions at several points of his life. Johnny is a self-confident person in front of the thousands who pay to see him perform, but says that he is shy when meeting with the inevitable few people backstage at his concerts. By his own admission, Johnny says that he was a hit in the '50s and '60s but lost that momentum in the '70s and was "nonexistent" in the '80s before making something of a comeback in the '90s. Johnny is father to four daughters by his first wife, one son by June and two stepdaughters. Over the course of his life, he meets and connects with many people from the music industry and has stories to tell about many of them.

June Carter Cash

June is very young when she begins performing with her parents, Maybelle and Ezra Carter. Though those years, she develops her own musical ability and her natural talent as a comedienne. When Johnny tells June soon after their first time working together that he plans to marry her some day, she laughs at him and says that she "can't wait." Johnny describes June as his perfect mate. He says that she is ultimately easy to live with and that she has stood by him regardless of how far down he's gone at times. Johnny laughingly says that June is a champion shopper, and that she's "saved" him a lot of money over the years. Johnny says his sole regret in his decision to marry June is that she's been more in his shadow than was fair for her own career. He says that she is under-appreciated and that he believes she always will be, simply because of her marriage to him. June is a performer in her own right, plays several instruments and sings, likely having learned at the hands of her parents. Johnny also cites her dedication to family, saying that she was never given an opportunity to sing alone that she did not first consult her family.

Jack Cash

Johnny's older brother. Jack is responsible and has announced by the time he's a teen that he plans to go into the ministry. Johnny says that no one doubts his sincerity, despite his age, because of Jack's personality as a stable, dependable young man. Jack is killed as a teenager, having been cut from his ribs down to his groin. He lives for



several days in the hospital and the family holds out hope for his recovery though the doctor knows that the injury was too severe for a long-term recovery.

W. S. Holland

Also known as Fluke, he's the drummer for Johnny's band since 1959, and is with him as they're touring in the 1990s. Johnny refers to an incident in which he and Fluke can't get a particular rhythm together. Fluke remains with Johnny for his entire career and Johnny says that Fluke is the "solid rock" of the group.

Marshall Grant

One of the two who make up the original band behind Johnny's music, known as the Tennessee Two. Johnny meets Marshall through Johnny's brother, Roy, who works with both Marshall and Luther. Marshall is a mechanic and is good at his craft. Marshall at one point is quoted as saying that their band didn't have to work at getting that distinctive sound because it came naturally and was all they could learn to play. Marshall goes on to manage the Statler Brothers.

Luther Moore Perkins

One of the two who make up the original band behind Johnny's music, known as the Tennessee Two. Luther works with Johnny's brother, Roy, and it's that connection that eventually leads to Johnny meeting Luther. Johnny says that Luther works on radios and that he believes that to be the reason he connected so completely with Luther rather than Marshall.

Roy Orbison

Johnny's neighbor in Tennessee and his good friend, Roy lost his wife to a motorcycle accident then two of his children to a house fire. Johnny says that he wasn't certain how Roy was going to survive, but that he eventually came around to life again. Roy dies of a heart attack in 1988 and Johnny says that the two men had made a pact some years before to let their hair grow long enough for a ponytail. Though Johnny had chickened out, Roy had done it.

Maybelle Carter

Mother of June Carter Cash and Johnny's mother-in-law, Maybelle is a respected performer who creates a new picking style. Johnny says he is criticized for his decision to perform with the Carters, including Maybelle, but that he believes she remains an important part of his career and one that he has never regretted.



Bob and Vicki Wooton

The couple who travel with Johnny and June in Unit One, driving the bus. Johnny notes that he trusts them completely and cites a particular time when they were leaving a concert and a young person, probably high on drugs, steps in front of the bus and refuses to move. Johnny says that he'd learned that his presence makes things worse and so he remains where he is and Vicki handles it so that they're soon back on the road. Johnny notes that it's necessary to have two drivers because of the laws about the amount of time one can drive without a rest period, and the need to fill out paperwork.

Pete Barnhill

A boy who lives near Johnny when he is a teenager and the two bond in their common love of music when Johnny is thirteen. Pete is a victim of infantile paralysis, or polio, and one arm and one leg are smaller than they should be for his age. Johnny notes that it hurts him to see other children mimicking Pete's shuffling walk and that Johnny himself mimics Pete's style on the guitar.



Objects/Places

Kingsland, Arkansas

Where Johnny was born.

Dyess Colony, Arkansas

The government farming colony where Johnny moved with his family in 1934.

Cinnamon Hill, Jamaica

Where Johnny has a house and where he is when he begins writing his book.

Unit One

The name of Johnny's tour bus.

Germany

Where Johnny serves his time in the military.

Memphis, Tennessee

Where Johnny settles after his return from his military stint in Germany.

Lake City, Tennessee

Where Carl Perkin is raised.

Old Hickory Lake

Where Luther Perkins lives when a house fire takes his life.

Port Richey

Where the home of June's parents is.

The Holy Land

Where Gospel Road was filmed.



Themes

Love of Music

Johnny Cash's earliest memories are tied up in his family and largely in his mother's singing. From then, Johnny is enamored with music and loves to hear anyone sing. He recalls when his family finally got a radio and says that it was then the biggest treat of all when a sudden rainstorm would chase the family in from their work in the fields so that Johnny would have free hours to listen to the music on the radio. John is also excited to learn that a young boy in the neighborhood, Pete Barnhill, has a guitar. While the other children are making fun of Pete because he is crippled from a case of polio, Johnny spends many happy hours with his young friend, listening to his music. Johnny has admiring stories about many people he believes to have musical ability, including some he says are under-appreciated by the general public and even sometimes by the music industry and other professionals. One of these is June's mother, Maybelle, Carter. Johnny admires her ability on the autoharp and says that she impacts the industry by creating and popularizing a new method of picking out a melody and chords at the same time. Johnny's love for music is such that he often spends time with others in the business, often for the love of singing rather than for any financial profit.

Need for Honesty

Johnny says that he wants his music to be popular, but wants it to be - above all else - honest. He also says that he, Luther and Marshall were not overly talented on the point of being able to put together musical scores for new songs. While he says that this does limit him, he says that he doesn't really regret it. He also points out that they could have learned, given the drive and opportunity, but that he was somewhat lazy about making the effort to do so. He ends that particular thought by saying that their music was, first and foremost, honest, and that as he looks back on it, he's not ashamed of their performances for that reason alone. Johnny also fears for the honesty of his music later when he's looking for a way to make a comeback almost two decades after his last series of hits. He says that he feared that the music would lose its honesty as those in charge seek to make him fit into some current mold that promises popularity. Toward that end, he initially declines an offer by a new producer but comes to decide that he will put out another album that focuses solely on his own voice and his acoustic guitar.

Love of God

There is a low point in Johnny's life in which he goes to a labyrinth of caves and crawls inside with the intention of dying there. He says that when his flashlight goes out, he lies in the dark and is very still. It's there that he realizes that God has a purpose for his life and that it's not up to him to decide when his life will end. Johnny manages to find his way out of the caves and finds June and his mother waiting for him. He immediately

tells them that he's dedicating his life to God and will do whatever it takes to make that happen. Later, Johnny has a television show and it's during the lead-in to a gospel song that Johnny, spurred by having received a large number of letters questioning his faith, says that he is a Christian. Johnny says the producers are not happy with his statement but he refuses to retract it. At another point, Johnny says that anyone who knows God and knows about Heaven and Hell would gladly give up the sale of a few records in order to ascertain their place in Heaven.



Style

Perspective

The book is written in first person from Johnny Cash's perspective. The point of view is very limited and the reader learns only those things that Johnny knows, and is further limited in that the reader learns only those things that Johnny is willing to share. One important point related to the perspective is that Johnny denies some of the stories that are commonly repeated about him, gives different versions of some stories from those in other literary and film works, and completely ignores some things. For example, Johnny says that many people believe that he was in prison and want to know what he did that landed him there. Johnny says that, contrary to that legend, he was never in prison though he spent an occasional night in jail after his addiction took control of his life because law enforcement officials sometimes decided he was too much a danger to himself to be released. Another point is that there have been some works that indicate Johnny's father, Ray, to have blamed Johnny for the death of his brother Jack. Johnny doesn't hint at this at all and it's left to the reader to determine which version is true. The reader should always keep in mind that autobiographies are always slanted by both the view of the author and the level to which he or she is willing to be truthful regardless of the subject. The fact that Johnny tells the story of his brother's death seems to indicate that he is telling the story as it happens.

Tone

The story is written in a rambling way that some readers may find to be disjointed. For example, Johnny Cash, the author, returns several times to specific stories, either presenting them with different details or with some slightly different slant. Sometimes, the details and the point remain basically the same. For example, Johnny tells of his devotion to his father-in-law, saying that the two men had become close after Johnny's near-death experience in the cavern. He mentions that his father-in-law is a self-taught theologian and that Johnny greatly respects this aspect of his father-in-law's character. The book is copyrighted 1997 and the overall setting - that of Johnny's current situation - is based in that time in Jamaica, where Johnny begins writing his story. However, the majority of the book is set in the various places and times of Johnny's life, beginning from his early childhood in Arkansas and going through a great deal of his travels on various tours. At two points, Johnny presents a list of places they'd been recently. Though the places are not the same, the point is that they've traveled extensively.

Structure

The book is written in five parts, Cinnamon Hill, The Road, Port Richey, Bon Aqua, and The Road Again. The parts range from less than thirty pages for the final part to more than one hundred pages on Bon Aqua. Each of the parts is further divided into chapters.



Part Five, *The Road Again*, is divided into only two chapters. There are ten chapters in two of the parts. These chapters range from only two pages to more than ten with most averaging about eight. The parts are divided into places. Cinnamon Hill, Port Richey and Bon Aqua are each places owned by Johnny and his family. Each of these are important to Johnny and his family in various ways. The story is not presented at all in chronological order. For example, Johnny tells the story of his life in Arkansas as a young boy. In the following chapter, Johnny goes back to his life at Cinnamon Hill and memories that happened over the years at that home before dropping back in time to recall his first performance dates. Much later Johnny tells about his time in Germany which happens prior to those first performance dates. This lack of organization keeps the reader guessing as to what is to come next and makes it difficult to assign a time line to the various stories.



Quotes

"According to the media at that time, that caused an overnight change in my status from 'Nashville has-been' to 'hip icon.' Whatever they called me, I was grateful. It was my second major comeback; the minor ones have been too many to count." Cinnamon Hill, Chapter One, Page 7

"There's no way around grief or loss: you can dodge all you want, but sooner or later you just have to go into it, through it, and hopefully, come out on the other side. The world you find there will never be the same as the world you left." Cinnamon Hill, Chapter Three, Page 27

"Thereafter she always used that term when she talked about my music, and I think she did so on purpose, to remind me that the music in me was something special given by God. My job was to care for it and use it well; I was its bearer, not its owner." The Road, Chapter One, Page 54

"The air force taught me the things every military service imparts to its enlisted men - how to cuss, how to look for women, how to drink and fight - plus one skill that's pretty unusual: if you ever need to know what one Russian is signaling to another in Morse code, I'm your man." The Road, Chapter Two, Page 59

"Marshall Grant was mostly right when in later years he said that we didn't work to get that boom-chicka-boom sound - it's all we could play. But it served us well and it was ours. You know whose voice was coming when you heard it kick off." The Road, Chapter Three, Page 76

"I've always resented the time and energy business takes away from music - lawyers desperately needing decisions when the song in my head desperately needs to come out; accountants telling me I need to go there and sing that when I really want to stay here and sing this. The concepts don't match up. A businessman looks at a song and sees a pile of money surrounded by questions about its ownership; I see one of my babies." The Road, Chapter Four, Page 81

"When we could, we'd stop at restaurants on the highway and invariably we'd order friend chicken, roast pork sandwiches, creamed potatoes, fried okra - real country food. In a hurry, not stopping for lunch, we'd pull off at a store and stock up on bologna and cheese and crackers and Cokes." The Road, Chapter Six, Page 96

"But it's like the old saying about the wino: he starts by drinking out of the bottle, and then the bottle starts drinking out of him. The person starts by taking the drugs, but then the drugs start taking the person. That's what happened to me." Port Richey, Chapter Two, Page 140



"Then I jerked the shirt off and threw it to her. She ironed it, and I went on stage in a nicely pressed shirt. Thus began her lifelong dedication to cleaning me up, and my lifelong acceptance of that mission." Port Richey, Chapter Four, Page 158.

"I've always thought it ironic that it was a prison concert, with me and the convicts getting along just as fellow rebels, outsiders, and miscreants should, that pumped up my marketability to the point where ABC thought I was respectable enough to have a weekly network TV show." Bon Aqua, Chapter Two, Page 201

"Those were such busy, demanding days. Often they were exhilarating, but sometimes it felt like I was just a passenger on the Johnny Cash train, powerless over my destination, speed, or schedule. Still, I was riding first-class, and that made up for a lot." Bon Aqua, Chapter Five, Page 219

"She's got charm, she's got brains, she's got style, she's got class. She's got silver, she's got gold, she's got jewelry, she's got furniture, she's got china ... she's got a black belt in shopping." Bon Aqua, Chapter Seven, Page 233

"Hopefully, that'll continue to be the final work on Johnny Cash, right up to the moment when, halfway through 'Ring of Fire' or 'I Sill Miss Someone' or 'Sunday Morning Coming Down,' I'll just keel over and die on the stage, under the lights, with my band and my family around me and Fluke still laying down the beat. That's every performer's dream, you know." The Road Again, Chapter One, Page 272



Topics for Discussion

Describe the steps of Johnny's career. Where along the way does he falter? Where is he most strong? What is it that keeps him going?

Describe Johnny's childhood. What is his father like? His mother? Who is Jack? How does Jack impact Johnny's life?

How does Johnny meet June? How has June come to be in the music industry? What role does she play in Johnny's life?

List at least three people Johnny identifies as important in his life. What is the attitude of Johnny toward these people? Which of the three probably had the greatest impact on Johnny's life? Support your answer?

What is life like on the road for Johnny Cash and the other young performers of the day? How do drugs play into that life? What is the long-term impact of that lifestyle on the performers, including Johnny?

Johnny has several pieces of property. List three that are important to him and give detailed reasons why these properties hold a place in his life?

Who is Carl Perkins? Roy Orbison? Luther Perkins? W.S. Marshall? Marshall Grant? Pete Barnhill? Maybell Carter? Jack Cash? Ray Cash? Carrie Cash? What roles does each of these play in the life of Johnny?