

# **Who I Am: A Memoir Study Guide**

## **Who I Am: A Memoir by Pete Townshend**

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# Plot Summary

Pete Townsend is a famous rock star, and the lead guitarist as well as the main songwriter for the incredibly successful band, The Who. In this biography he tells the story of his life, analyses his own behavior, and eventually comes to the conclusion that he is comfortable with and proud of who he is.

Pete's parents were musicians in a war-time and post-war band called The Squadronaires. Pete traveled with them on their tour bus and to holiday camps where they performed. He had a strange childhood and never felt completely loved or protected by his parents. For a while he was sent to live with his maternal grandmother Denny, where he suffered sexual abuse from the men who visited her. This had a strong, negative impact on his life.

When Pete moved back in with his parents, he learned to play the guitar and joined a school band. While attending art college he joined Roger Daltrey's band, in which his school friend John Entwistle was also playing. The band grew in popularity and changed their name to The Who. They began to play regular gigs and earned a lot of money. They gained a manager, and even began performing as support acts for major bands like The Kinks and The Rolling Stones.

Pete quit college to go full time with the band. Two men called Kit and Chris bought the band and started to make records. The band went from success to success, including an album called 'Tommy' that was hugely successful when played live. The Who toured America, and later they played at Woodstock, where they were rocketed into rock fame and stardom.

Meanwhile, Pete had married his childhood girlfriend Karen Astley and they had two daughters, and later a son. They were happy at first, but Pete's rock lifestyle was having a bad effect on their marriage. Pete was throwing himself into his work, and also becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol, problems he battled with for the rest of his career. Pete began to have affairs, and eventually the marriage broke down completely. Pete moved out, and began seeing a woman called Rachel Fuller who also worked in the music business. They are still together now.

Pete struggled against addiction for a long time until he realized that he would need to face his own past and self-destructive personality before he could cure himself. He managed to address his rage and guilt over the sexual abuse of his childhood, and he also managed to deal with his anxiety and learned to be thankful for what he had. After therapy and rehab, Pete did eventually manage to conquer his drug and alcohol problems, and he also began to see that work could be just another addiction too. He is now happier and understands himself better.

The band was also beginning to fall apart. Keith had a lot of problems with drug addiction, and eventually died in 1978. The others continued without him and a new drum player joined, Kenney Jones. The band continued to perform and to tour,



especially when John needed help with money problems, but the members were also pursuing their own personal projects as well. Pete himself had a lot of success with live performances and a film of "Tommy", with a film called "Iron Man" (later changed to "The Iron Giant"), and various other projects.

In 2002 John Entwistle died, and Pete could not face continuing with the band. However, they have re-formed for charity events and occasional performances, and The Who continues to be successful.



# Act One: War Music. Chapters 1 - 3, 'I Was There', 'It's a Boy!', and 'You Didn't See It'

## Act One: War Music. Chapters 1 - 3, 'I Was There', 'It's a Boy!', and 'You Didn't See It' Summary and Analysis

Pete Townsend is a world-famous rock star, a guitar player in the band The Who. In this book, he tells the story of his life from growing up in post-war Britain, joining a band, and his first hits, all the way through the pitfalls and trials of rock star life to where he is now.

In the first chapter, 'I Was There', Pete remembers his first The Who show, at the Railway Hotel in London, June 1964. Here he first smashed his guitar, beginning The Who's tradition of auto-destruction.

Pete recognizes that music is an escape from fear and misery, and that it was an important part of post-war optimism, vital for the people who had lived through tragedy. He also identifies a change, however, in what music came to signify. By The Who's time, music expressed a sense of rebellion and freedom, of breaking away from tradition and from the mistakes of the past, which was signified in the smashing of instruments. This auto-destruction in The Who performances was more than just a gimmick. It was a necessary part of The Who's expression, and of what their music meant to both performers and audience.

In the next two chapters, Pete begins to tell the story of his life. Pete's parents both performed in an RAF band that played to entertain the troops during World War Two, which after the war became known as the Squadronaires. When Pete was born his mother quit singing with the band but still helped to manage it. Pete would accompany them on the tour bus, and to regular jobs playing at a holiday camp. He had an odd childhood but was happy. Then his parents decided to send him to live with his maternal grandmother, Denny, in order to help keep her mind from wandering, as she had been behaving oddly.

Denny was cruel and bossy, and Pete's dark, broken memories of this period of his life suggest that he was sexually abused by the men who visited Denny. Meanwhile, Pete's mother acquired a new lover and was planning on taking Pete away with them. Pete's father agreed at first, but then changed his mind. Pete's mother gave up on her plan and tried to make things work again with her husband. Pete came back to live with them.

Pete gained his true fascination with music one day when he heard harmonies while fishing in the river. This began a lifelong love of water as well as music. His Aunt Trilby encouraged his creative side and his interest in music. When Pete first went to see 'Rock Around the Clock' with his friend Jimpy, it sparked his love of Rock'n'Roll. His



parents, however, continued not to notice, convincing themselves that Pete had no musical talent.

Pete's memories of growing up are conflicted. When he was a young boy he had no sense that his childhood might have been unusual or neglectful, but looking back it is clear that he is angry about and resentful of some of the decisions his parents made. He blames them for sending him to Denny and for not noticing what happened to him there. He blames them for not focusing a little more on his needs, such as giving him a private space in the house to sleep in and to call his own. From Pete's account the reader gets an impression of parents who were a little too caught up in their own affairs and somewhat selfish when it came to their son.

Pete clearly idolized his father; he remembers him as his 'shining dad' and hated it when he was humiliated. He is more critical of his mother, but in truth it is clear that both parents let him down. His mother was not the motherly carer he longed for, and both she and his father failed to notice when he was in trouble. His father failed to encourage his love of music and did not step up to be the role-model Pete needed. Both parents may have been too affected by what they experienced during the war, driving them towards the pursuit of their own pleasure and immediate happiness and inhibiting them from settling into a secure family life.

Later in the story, it will become apparent that this childhood strongly affected Pete. He carried around a great deal of anger, hurt and mistrust for a long time afterwards, and the sexual abuse he experienced while living with Denny scarred him for life. It would take a long time before Pete was able to deal with the rage and pain this caused him.



# Chapters 4 - 6, 'A Teenage Kind of Vengeance', 'The Detours', and 'The Who'

## Chapters 4 - 6, 'A Teenage Kind of Vengeance', 'The Detours', and 'The Who' Summary and Analysis

Pete began to listen to a wide range of music, including the popular songs of the day. Jimpy's father made him a guitar to pretend to strum on, and one day Pete picked out a tune on it. Jimpy was amazed, and his father pointed out that Pete must have some talent to be able to play a tune on it. He suggested getting him a proper guitar, but Pete's father refused to buy him one. In the end, it was actually Denny who bought him an old one. It had broken strings, but Pete still loved it and practiced all the time.

Pete joined a band at school but was left behind when the other members started to play more with another band. Meanwhile, Pete wasn't very popular at school. His only friend at the time was John Entwistle, who would one day be a member of The Who and would remain Pete's friend throughout his life.

One day, an old childhood enemy called Roger Daltry approached Pete and asked if he might like to join his band. Pete was surprised but pleased, and said that he was interested. While attending Ealing Art College, Pete joined Roger's band, The Detours, who played gigs, events and weddings and were doing quite well. By March 1963 they were playing 17 or 18 shows a month and taking home nearly £30 a week, a lot of money at the time.

Pete began to hear more R&B at college, particularly liking Green Onions by Booker T and the MGs. The Detours had a chance to play a gig with Johnny Kidd and The Pirates once, which influenced them to change their sound. Roger gave up lead guitar to focus on singing, and Pete took over lead. At college, friends Tom Wright and Cam introduced Pete to all kinds of R&B and Blues music from the USA that he had never heard before. This had a big influence on him.

Pete wrote a song, 'It Was You', which was heard by Dick James, The Beatles' co-publisher, and Pete was signed to his company. The song was recorded by The Naturals and was not a hit, but it gave Pete a lot of confidence. He felt like he could push more for his sound in the band, and though he and Roger nearly came to blows several times, they developed a strong respect for each other.

Pete moved out into a flat with best friend Barney. He had his first experience of both sex and drugs (pot) at the same time. The band was now more successful and really beginning to go places. However, as Pete smoked more pot he began to lose interest in the band, and Roger had to force him to attend rehearsals.



When they were to support The Rolling Stones at Putney in December 1963, Pete was cynical at first, but when he heard them he loved their sound. He adopted a windmill arm technique from Keith Richards. In February 1964 they supported The Kinks for the first time, another band that became a primary influence on Pete. At this time they heard that another band was called The Detours and decided to re-name. Barney suggested The Who and a new name was born.

Helmut Gordon, a single man wanting excitement, became their new manager. He introduced them to a man from Fontana who was interested in a record deal but who thought that the drummer, Doug Sandom, was too old. Pete encouraged Doug to step down. Doug did so, but was very hurt. Pete now regrets this terribly, but this is what got The Who their break.

New drummers were auditioned, and Keith Moon joined the band. Keith was wary of the other band members at first, seeing Roger as a rival for girls, but he soon made very good friends with John.

The band then met Peter Meaden who became their publicist. He encouraged them to go with a more Mod image, which appealed to both Pete and John. Peter Meaden wrote them a song for their Fontana session, and encouraged them to rename the band to The High Numbers, a reference to Mod culture, but the hit was not a success despite his best efforts. He thought their sound was too uncool and did not recognize that they were something new and exciting.

Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp heard them and decided to make a film about them. Kit and Chris fought for control of the band and eventually Peter Meaden and Helmut Gordon were persuaded to sell for £200, a huge sum at the time. Kit and Chris gave the band back the name The Who.

The Who now began to play with some major artists: The Beatles, The Kinks, Dusty Springfield, Dave Berry, and Lulu. Shel Talmy, the producer of recent Kinks hits, agreed to hear them and recorded one of Pete's songs, altered to make it more commercial. Only time would tell if it would be a hit. Meanwhile, Kit saw the mess that Pete was living in, and asked him to move in with him.

Around this time things were changing rapidly for Pete and he does not always appear to have coped very well. He found it hard to take the band very seriously, even when they were doing well, perhaps thinking himself above it because they were not doing anything very different with their music. Pete was more into the Mod culture of the time, thinking himself very trendy and arty, and did not necessarily like playing commercial hits. Meanwhile, a rivalry was beginning to form between the fashionable Mods and the more machismo Rockers, two different youth sub-cultures in London. The music scene was changing rapidly as 'Youth' became a concept and a new audience in the post-war years. Music was turning from entertainment and a means of drowning out the tragedies of war, into an expression of freedom and change. This was the context in which The Who was born.





# Chapters 7 - 9, 'I Can't Explain', 'Substoot', and 'Acid in the Air'

## Chapters 7 - 9, 'I Can't Explain', 'Substoot', and 'Acid in the Air' Summary and Analysis

Pete's song 'I Can't Explain' was a hit, though they all agreed it was a little too commercial. The Who enjoyed new-found success, appearing on TV, Top of the Pops, and all over the radio. Pete began to see himself in the role of Voice of the Youth, putting their thoughts into words, expressing what they could not say. He finally began to take his music, and the band, more seriously.

Karen Astley, a college friend from Ealing, started to come to see Pete's shows. They began dating.

Living in Belgravia, a posh area of London, Pete began to see the huge divide between the people there and his people, the Youth. But he also became aware that it was more a class divide than an age divide. This informed the song 'My Generation'. This was a hit, and The Who became more popular than ever.

However, Pete was starting to become a bit depressed, as well as quite disaffected with the media who portrayed The Who as braggarts and scumbags. John and Keith considered leaving the band as they were not having a lot of fun, and problems with royalties meant that the other band members were not earning much. Pete himself was somewhat protected from this because he earned money from the songs he wrote, too.

A court case was brought against Shel, the producer of the songs, but Kit and Chris lost. The band was stuck with Shel and the feeble royalties he gave them. Allen Klein, the Stones' US publisher, and later involved with The Beatles, said that he could help, but they would have to sack Kit and Chris and sign with him instead. He flew Pete out to New York twice to discuss this. Kit and Chris were scared, so they settled out of court with Shel for a considerable amount of money. This helped improve the money situation for a while.

Meanwhile, the band was beginning to self-destruct from within. Roger and Keith were arguing even more over Keith's drug use. A big fight broke out at one point, with Pete throwing his guitar at Keith, and Keith attempting to throw a drum but ending up falling and gashing his leg. Tensions were very high. At this time Pete wrote a nonsense song 'Happy Jack', perhaps an attempt to remove himself from his depressing and stressful reality.

Kit and Chris managed to obtain publishing advances for a new album, to help out the band members who were all in debt at this time. The deal required each band member to contribute, so Pete helped the others to write their own songs. They needed more



material, so Pete offered a 'pop-opera' piece inspired by his dark past living with Denny - 'A Quick One, While He's Away.' In this chapter, Pete reveals a little more about the abuse that was hinted at earlier in the book; Denny regularly invited in men from the station opposite the flat, and Pete remembers his door opening in the night as strangers came in. The song's darker elements reflect this, such as the line about sitting in Igor the Engine Driver's lap and then taking a nap with him. The song ends with forgiveness as Pete tries to let go of the past, and as he tries to stop blaming himself for what happened.

The Who toured Europe and Keith's hotel destruction habits began. Pete explains that this was due to missing his wife so much, as well as paranoia about what she might do while he was away. In Amsterdam, Pete went off with a random man who could have had any intentions towards him. All the band members seemed to be exhibiting self-destructive tendencies at this point. The Who had been rocketed into success and fame very quickly, and perhaps they were all finding it hard to cope with the sudden lifestyle changes, as well as the easy access to drugs and alcohol. Their self-destructive behavior might have been a way to cope with pent up rage and fear (such as in Pete's case), as well as perhaps a challenge to the world to give them something more meaningful in their lives. They had fame and success, but very little sense of purpose.

Pete now discovered LSD, which was just beginning to become popular at this time. This was also the time of the Swinging Sixties: free love and drugs. Pete was terrified that Karen might lose him, but also afraid of not being able to keep up with what was cool, and of being left behind. These fears were perhaps made worse by past abandonment in his childhood.

Pete became good friends with Eric Clapton, often going to Jimi Hendrix concerts with him, and he was also inspired by a great many musicians at this time. From this book it is clear to see that no matter what kind of music artists played at the time, they were all influenced by a great many different styles, listening to everything and appropriating bits of what they liked. This included Blues, R&B, psychedelic music, Jazz, Brit pop, eastern sounds, classical music, and more. Bands and singers did not only listen to 'their' type of music. There is a sense that Pete believes music was less restrained and more innovative in his time.



# Chapters 10 - 12, 'God Checks in to a Holiday Inn', 'Amazing Journey', 'Tommy: The Myths, The Music, The Mud'

## Chapters 10 - 12, 'God Checks in to a Holiday Inn', 'Amazing Journey', 'Tommy: The Myths, The Music, The Mud' Summary and Analysis

The Who went on tour in America, and Keith Moon's ego was beginning to get out of control. However, the band was beginning to work better together again, and tensions were receding. Pete was happier to take a back role in the band and just enjoy the music for now, but in the future he hoped for less popular, gimmicky music. He wanted to say something with his songs and to really change people's lives for the better. One night Pete heard the voice of god in a hotel room in Illinois. This quiet but amazing experience left him torn between his psychedelic lifestyle and longing for a simpler life back in England at art college.

When they returned from America, The Who recorded a new album, 'The Who Sell Out'. The album did not do as well as expected, and they began to worry that they may have neglected their British fans.

Meanwhile, changes in the way Pete and Karen were acting with each other began to make him think seriously about being a husband and father. He was also beginning to feel responsible for his band mates; it was his job to come up with the hits and he had not managed to lately. He felt torn between focusing less on art and more on money and practical concerns, and on the need to say something meaningful with his music. At the same time, he also believed The Who's audience was ready for longer songs, even if the producers did not think so.

Pete became involved in the Meher Baba society and was getting quite serious about it. Meher Baba was a wise man from India who was said to be God realized. He wrote essays, books and poetry, and visited the western world many times to promote his spiritualist views. When Pete was on tour in Australia he met a girl called Rosie who also believed thoroughly in Meher Baba's spiritual messages. Pete slept with her, but then felt terribly guilty when he got home. He decided to tell Karen, but she already knew from a letter from Rosie. She forgave him, but implicit in this was the expectation that they would now stop fooling around and get married. Pete was happy about this and felt ready to commit. Later, his first daughter, Emma, was born.



Pete started working on 'Tommy', a long album that told a story of a boy reborn many times before achieving spiritual realization. This was to be a thematic album of 'rock opera'. While writing the album, Pete found it hard to write about childhood abuse, and so turned to John for help. The band pulled together on the album and everyone was very supportive of 'Tommy', even though it was really Pete's big dream.

Kit worried that the album might be too serious, and Nik Cohn, a young music critic from the Guardian newspaper, confirmed this when he listened to it. Pete jokingly asked if he would like it better if Tommy were a pinball champion, as Nik and Pete regularly played pinball together. Nik said that if that were the case he would give it 5 stars. Pete then wrote 'Pinball Wizard', and inserted lines about pinball elsewhere into the album. He played with an idea Meher Baba had spoken of that God may be playing marbles with the universe. The whole album was in part inspired by the spiritualism of Meher Baba, and so he is credited as 'Avatar' on the album cover. Pete found it important to incorporate his beliefs into his music in this way, as he has always seen music as a highly spiritual pleasure, as more meaningful and more important than simple entertainment.

'Tommy' was not received well at first, and 'Pinball Wizard' was heavily criticized. Pete believes that despite the criticism this album was important for drawing much-needed attention to The Who, which their 'normal' chart songs would not have pulled. It was also important for Pete to get it out of his system, and to realize that songs with purpose, inspired by something and with a story behind them, were the direction he needed to be heading in with his music. 'Tommy' helped him to become a better songwriter.

However, it was when they played 'Tommy' live that they began to have huge success with it. It worked perfectly live, blowing away a formerly unfriendly audience and becoming an instant hit. The band also worked together better on stage when playing 'Tommy', instead of the usual competing for attention.

In America, Pete was arrested for kicking a police officer who had run onto the stage and grabbed the microphone. Pete had not realized the man was trying to clear the stage quickly because of a fire next door. Pete spent the night in a cell and later had to face charges in court. This had a big impact on him, and at the time all he wanted to do was return to his family. At this stage it seems Pete was finding the schism between his rock star image and his family life quite difficult to handle.

Before flying home from the States, Frank Barsalona, The Who's agent in New York, pitched Woodstock to Pete. Woodstock was a planned monumental rock concert. Pete thought it sounded good, but did not want to commit to leaving his family again so soon after the USA tour. He said no, but Frank locked him in the apartment until he would agree. Pete missed his flight home and eventually signed the contract just to get away.

Woodstock was full of mud and drugs, and it had an extremely charged atmosphere. Pete describes it with images of sprites and fairyland, like a magical but strange and slightly sinister place. His descriptions do not seem quite real, as if the whole thing is



like a dream to Pete now, or a half-remembered drugged vision. When The Who played, Pete felt a deep connection with the audience. 'Tommy' seemed like music written especially for this kind of concert. Later Woodstock became a legend and everyone who played there took on mythic status. The Who were rocketed into rock aristocracy and have stayed there ever since.

After Woodstock The Who recorded a live album at Leeds, which was a huge success. The heavy guitar-driven energy was, Pete claims, what inspired the heavy metal revolution that was soon to come. The live album got rave reviews, and propelled the band even more into fame and success.



## **Act Two: A Really Desperate Man. Chapters 13-16, 'Lifehouse and Loneliness', 'The Land Between', 'Carriers', and 'A Beggar, A Hypocrite'**

### **Act Two: A Really Desperate Man. Chapters 13-16, 'Lifehouse and Loneliness', 'The Land Between', 'Carriers', and 'A Beggar, A Hypocrite' Summary and Analysis**

The Who were enjoying great success, and were suddenly out in open water without many rivals for their sound. Unfortunately, the band members were finding some aspects of celebrity difficult to deal with. For Pete, the pressure to keep delivering success was hard. Song lyrics for "The Seeker" reflect how Pete was feeling (though he only recognizes this now): angry, but hiding it under a performance, a desperate man seeking something but not knowing what.

In 1970 Pete began writing articles for a music magazine called 'Melody Maker'. He was filling up all his free time and not spending much with his family. He also wrote a dystopian story about a future in which humans have destroyed the earth through using too many resources, and so are plugged into the Grid (virtual reality). Rock music is banned because of its potential to wake people up. A place called The Lifehouse is established, where people can come to sing their own music. A kind of musical harmony called 'the one perfect note' is achieved, and when the authorities show up they find that everyone has gone, disappeared into musical Nirvana. The story reflected how Pete felt about himself: a person prone to depressed and self-destructive periods, but saved by music, feeling that there is a deep importance and spirituality to music. Pete also felt that he was the one who needed to convey this to everyone else. He was more than just an entertainer; he believed he was someone very important. Not being able to pursue this goal, and not yet finding this kind of meaning in his life, was making him depressed and desperate.

Pete now wanted to pursue this idea in real life: the idea that there was a spiritual and musical harmony that everyone could achieve, and a perfect note, the note of existence. He began to use synthesizers as backing to live rock music, and used the story of Lifehouse for a new album of the same name. The band did not really understand this project, however, and Pete was increasingly frustrated.

Karen became pregnant with their second child. At this point she was only 23, and Pete was 25.



Pete Kameron, the man Kit and Chris hired as their own manager, came over from New York to help Pete with his idea for Lifehouse. He suggested that it was so theatrical it needed to be work-shopped in a theatre. They used the Young Vic Theatre for this. Unfortunately, this did not work well, and the other band members were bewildered and not on his side. Pete became even more depressed over the failure of his vision.

Then Kit called to say that he had found a wonderful recording studio in New York that Pete would love, called The Record Plant. Pete flew there and loved it, and was instantly re-invigorated. They recorded songs that he had ready such as "Won't Get Fooled Again", "Behind Blue Eyes", and "Baba O'Riley". However, Kit was now dealing with a serious heroin addiction and his relationship with Pete became even more strained than before.

Pete left New York for London and asked Glyn Johns, their old producer, to work on what they had of the album so far. He agreed, demonstrating straight away that he was a better sound engineer than Kit. The album came out as 'Who's Next' with a sleeve Pete hated. The fans loved it, however, and it went to No.1 in the UK.

Pete was becoming even more self-destructive and confused, cheating on his wife and dealing with the guilt, becoming more violent on stage, and drinking more and more. His drinking soon got out of control; he ranted as his mother while drunk, destroyed his wife's china, and drove a car into a tree. Keith and John were still using hard drugs constantly, and Roger was finding it hard to cope with his frustrations with the band and the music.

Pete felt that he needed to do something to try to hold the band together. He came up with "Quadrophenia", an album that would showcase the four personalities and stroke each of their egos. This was to be a fun and optimistic album. Around this time Pete had an epiphany. He was not actually alone and should not feel so isolated and depressed. He realized that his part of "Quadrophenia" should be about finding redemption in his loved and lost band mates, by recounting his pathetic life to them.

"Quadrophenia" was not a huge success, but it was a success. The four sides of the album are: the tough guy, a helpless dancer (Roger), a romantic (John), a bloody lunatic (Keith), and a beggar and hypocrite (Pete). Pete now admits that all four sides could be considered part of himself. Now Pete seemed to be facing his own demons and at least trying to change for the better.

Unfortunately, the band was no longer doing so well on stage, and there was a feeling that The Who might be starting to fizzle out.



# Chapters 17 - 20, 'Be Careful What You Pray For', 'The Undertaker', 'Growing into my Skin', and 'Rock Star Fuckup'

## Chapters 17 - 20, 'Be Careful What You Pray For', 'The Undertaker', 'Growing into my Skin', and 'Rock Star Fuckup' Summary and Analysis

There was a lot of interest in making "Tommy" into a film, but it was not until 1974 that it started to become a reality, directed by Ken Russell. Some changes to the story were made, but Pete was happy and very excited to see how it would unfold. Some very famous people were chosen for the roles, with Eric Clapton playing the role of Tommy. Eric had been suffering from heroin addiction for a long time but was now clean. Now he begged Pete to come to George Harrison's house, to distract him while Eric talked to his wife Patty, in the hope of persuading her to leave George for him. She did, and the pair seemed much happier with each other.

While 'Tommy' was being made, other band members became involved in their own projects. Keith and John worked on solo projects, and Roger agreed to take the lead role in Ken Russell's next film. Pete was irritated by this, feeling that The Who was being put aside for individuals' interests. This is somewhat ironic, as Pete had just done this himself with 'Tommy', and was constantly filling his time with various projects. In fact, Pete was becoming increasingly tired and run down from all his work.

Pete turned to a show-business lawyer called Sam Sylvester for help with all the legal issues surrounding the film version of 'Tommy'. Ina Meibach gave similar help in the USA. Sam and Ina soon became good friends. Pete began to feel very safe and protected in a way that he had never done before in his musical career. Finally he had competent people on his side with his best interests at heart.

'Tommy' the film was received well, but Pete felt that it missed something, a feeling of post-war shame and anger that the older generation did not want to face, but which the younger generation needed to deal with. This had been a huge part of Pete's life and experiences, and so it was important to him. This meant that the film of 'Tommy' did not help him to feel fulfilled as he had hoped it would. He was still hoping for more, and still following his artistic vision of how music should achieve something meaningful. He began to worry that he would not be able to accomplish all that he wanted to while still encumbered with The Who. He started to consider the possibilities of leaving the band.

Meanwhile, Roger now had superstar status gained from working in the movies. Keith was clearly jealous; there had always been rivalry between the two. Roger was unhappy with Pete about the film 'The Who By Numbers', because Pete has given interviews that





revealed a lot of personal details about the other band members, not always painting them in the best light. Pete asked Ina for advice and she said to let Roger win once. Pete saw that she was right and wrote to Roger, apologizing and saying that he would support Roger in whatever way he wanted to go next with the band. This helped, and the tension between them eased. Pete also made the decision to stop drinking. There is a sense that he was finally beginning to get his life on track, sort out his issues and begin to side with the people who could really help him. Unfortunately, this would not last for long.

One night, at a dinner party for Keith's birthday, Keith announced that he would be leaving the band. Pete was annoyed and asked what Keith would do next: eat another flower? This was referring to Keith's party trick of eating one of the flowers at the table. Keith told Pete to eat one instead. Pete did, but must have been allergic to something and his throat began to close up. Keith was terrified and shouted at the other dinner guests to call an ambulance while he comforted Pete. Pete's throat opened again after a minute, and Keith told him he had only been joking about leaving The Who. Pete had seen that Keith was genuinely terrified when he thought Pete was choking, and for the first time he saw how much Keith actually loved and cared for Pete.

Here the reader might wonder if Keith had actually intended to leave, but had been stopped by his own realization of how much Pete and the band meant to him. It is also possible that Keith had seen that Pete was thinking of leaving and had made his own fake announcement in an attempt to get Pete to see how much the band means to him. Whatever the truth, this episode effectively put an end to Pete's thoughts of leaving the band, for now at least. This incident also demonstrates how much of a rock star's life is bravado. Pete himself admits later in the book that confidence can be faked and that 'coolness' is something that is put on a person. He explains that he never felt cool; it was all a performance. It would seem that the same can be said for a lot of Keith's behavior. He had a reputation and an image to maintain, but underneath this he truly cared about his friends and family, and he maintained a sense of what was important.

Pete worked on an album, 'Rough Mix', with his friend Ronnie Lane, who had just quit the band The Small Faces. Pete told Ronnie about cheating on Karen and his guilt over it, and Ronnie pointed out that he seemed to be trying to drive Karen away. Pete did not want to see this at the time, but now he can admit that Ronnie was right. Pete's marriage had already begun to break down.

Aaron Schecter, Pete's New York accountant, called him to New York on a matter of great urgency. Here, a million pounds was being held in his name, as Allen Klein had been allowed to freeze the money in lieu of a legal case. A whole day was spent negotiating with Allen before they were able to come to an agreement, but eventually Pete got his money. Now a sudden millionaire, Pete decided to take a holiday, and then started his own book publishing company with Matthew Price, called Eel Pie Books. Pete was still finding ways to stay constantly busy, neglecting his family life and pushing himself constantly. He was still desperately seeking something, but did not know what yet.



The Who began working on the 'Who Are You' album, but Keith was getting worse and worse, ill and tired from constant drug use, and his music was suffering. He had already collapsed on stage several times, and Pete now refused to tour again until Keith got some help. Keith began trying to build a life beyond The Who, making films in Hollywood. Pete also began to pile more projects on himself. The band was drifting apart. Pete flew to Malibu to visit Keith, to try to help him. Keith decided to come home to London and asked Pete to rent him a flat. He did, but Keith was still getting worse. Then one night Keith died.

Pete persuaded the others to go on tour again, and looked for a replacement drummer. They accepted Kenney Jones, who had played drums for The Small Faces. The comeback concert was received very well and Kenney Jones was brilliant on the drums, despite some misgivings from Roger.

Pete's personal life, however, was falling apart. He could tell Karen was sick of him, and she began to spend a lot of time with a man called Ben from her teaching course. One night Pete asked her if she still loved him and she said no, then 'maybe a little.' Pete wrote a song called 'A Little Is Enough'. When The Who toured the States again, Pete convinced himself that his marriage was over and tried to cultivate a cool, rock-star image. He cheated on Karen several times. He began an affair with a woman named Jackie and rented a flat in London so that he could spend time with her. He also tried to seduce a beautiful actress called Theresa Russell behind her husband's back, but she rejected him.

Pete's attempt to stop drinking had failed, and he had taken cocaine for the confidence to talk to Theresa. Now he was having withdrawal symptoms and was desperate for more drugs. He soon fell back into hard drinking and cocaine use. Pete was a seriously desperate man, and he needed help, but he could not quite see this yet.



# Act Three: Playing to the Gods, Chapters 21 - 23, 'The Last Drink', 'Still Loony', and 'Iron Man'

## Act Three: Playing to the Gods, Chapters 21 - 23, 'The Last Drink', 'Still Loony', and 'Iron Man' Summary and Analysis

By 1981, The Who had survived the Punk movement, but now Punk was giving way to New Romanticism and its offshoots. This was another 'teenybopper' age in which girls once again screamed for good looking musicians. Both Pete and Roger cut their hair and attempted to keep up with modern trends. Pete admits that he was worrying about being left behind, but not yet old enough to let new ideas and fashions pass by. He was still conscious of the need to be cool and to be able to relate to the youth.

Meanwhile, social borders were also beginning to break down, and the world was changing. Pete remembered how things, and music, had changed on his father, leaving him behind, and he was determined not to let this happen to him too. Unfortunately, The Who's audience was also getting older, and their music no longer appealed to today's youth. The Who had stood for the working classes after the world wars, a time of optimism and hope, when the working classes had opportunities beyond the factories of their parents, when they were struggling for freedom and expression, and when they needed to let out the rage and shame of the effects of war. Now the working classes were feeling betrayed and thrown away, without future or hope. The Thatcher government was about to come into power, and there were more people than ever on the dole. The Who's kind of music was no longer relevant. Now it was the fury and nihilism of Punk that expressed the youth best.

Pete had a sense of needing to look within himself, and to grow by reclaiming his lost childhood. He also began to get more involved in charity. Growing older gave him a sense of needing to connect meaningfully with the world again, but it also terrified him, causing him to feel unfulfilled and to seek solace in drink. Pete's drinking was worse than ever, and Karen made him move out until he got it under control. His children missed him, and Minta, his younger daughter, sent him a letter begging him to come home, but still he could not stop.

Pete met a woman called Louise Reay and fell for her, soon becoming completely obsessed with her. One day Mark Macauley, a shareholder in the Embassy Club, offered to take Pete and his daughters to the opening night of "Cats". Pete could not bear to be away from Louise for a night, so he pretended that Louise was Mark's partner. His daughters saw through this ruse, however, and went home to tell their mother.



Pete took too much cocaine one night and overdosed. He was taken to hospital and resuscitated, but was technically dead for a short time. When he told Karen, she slapped him. He rang a doctor and arranged hypnotherapy treatment for addiction. Despite his overdose, he was still taking cocaine at this point. Eventually he went to rehab in California, and was finally able to get clean of drugs.

Pete seems to have an addictive personality that causes him to easily become obsessed with things, whether it is work, love, drugs or alcohol. He throws all of himself into whatever his latest obsession is at the expense of everything else. Pete had not realized it yet, but it was not alcohol or drugs that were his problem; it was addiction in general, a self-destructive attitude, and an inability to be thankful for what he had. Simply attending rehab and getting clean would not solve the problem until he was ready to face the real problem: himself.

The next The Who album, 'It's Hard' came out in 1982. This was followed by a tour billed as The Who's farewell tour. Pete did not argue with this, still hoping for a future in which he pursued his goals independently of the band. He moved back in with Karen and spent more time with his family. In 1983 he told Roger that he would no longer go on tour with The Who. He would do charity events and such things, but no more rock tours. Roger took the news well, obviously expecting it.

Faber offered Pete a job as an editor in charge of a list of books about 'popular arts'. Pete threw himself into this work. He also pursued a lot of charity work, helping with battered wives, drug addiction and other projects. He briefly performed again as part of Live Aid. Continuing to work on solo albums, performing now and again with various people, editing books, writing books, working with charities and more, it seems that Pete had returned to his old addiction: work.

Pete's father died of bowel cancer and his mother, now a terrible drunk, attempted suicide several times. Pete decided to check her into rehab. Meanwhile, from his own therapy he had uncovered the abuse of his past and begun to understand all his pent up rage and self-destructive behavior. Finally he began to accept that he had a big problem to deal with.

Karen decided she wanted another child and Pete began to worry about money. Around this time, offers came at him to rejoin The Who, make another album, and do one more tour. He was reluctant at first, but when Ina told him how much money he could make from a tour, Pete finally agreed. Karen was extremely annoyed and she almost left Pete, but then she became pregnant again. In November 1989 Karen gave birth to their third child, a son, who they named Joseph. Once again Pete was determined to get his life back on track for the sake of his family.



# Chapters 24 - 26, 'Psychoderelict', 'Relapse', and 'Noodling'

## Chapters 24 - 26, 'Psychoderelict', 'Relapse', and 'Noodling' Summary and Analysis

In 1990 The Who were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Pete began working on a solo album called "Psychoderelict". He was once again working too hard and neglecting his family, and things were beginning to get very strained with his wife. One day he had an accident on a bike and fell and broke his wrist badly. The doctor reset it but it was never the same again. The pain medicine helped for a while, but when Pete stopped taking them he had withdrawal symptoms. He began experimenting with small amounts of alcohol again, and soon fell back into old drinking habits.

Pete met a girl called Lisa at a party and started pursuing her. He invited her to the Tony Awards and she came, but did not go home with him. He experienced the usual anxiety of being abandoned, on the edge of a panic attack because he did not get what he wanted. Pete has shown himself over and over to be a very insecure person. He has always worried about his image, about not being taken seriously, and about not deserving happiness. When things have not gone well for him, he has seen it as a reflection on himself instead of simply taking it in his stride and moving on. He has perhaps also become a little too used to getting what he wants, meaning that he always pursued what he could not have, and reacted extremely badly when told 'no'. Meanwhile, Pete's marriage was very much in trouble.

Pete moved out of the house he shared with Karen. Although he enjoyed time spent with his son, otherwise he was quite miserable. He began to divide his time between the USA and the UK, between the "Psychoderelict" and 'Iron Man' projects. He was trying to fill his time with constant work in a desperate attempt to give his life meaning. This was leading to trouble with exhaustion and nerves. Pete was close to break-down.

Pete now recognized that alcohol was not to blame. It was part of the problem, but not the cause, as he approached alcohol like a kind of medicine to dull the pain of his life. The main problem was himself, his self-obsession, over-work, addictive personality, manic-depression, and extreme selfishness. To fix his life and to be happy, he would have to address those problems first. Pete decided to seek counseling for relapsed alcoholics. He received a lot of support and help from his girlfriend Lisa, but Karen became very jealous and Pete knew that to save his marriage he had to break things off with Lisa. She sent him a sad and angry note telling him that she hoped that what he was gaining was worth what he was giving up. Pete admits he has often wondered about this since.

Roger arranged an orchestral tour to pay tribute to Pete. Pete was supposed to perform with him, but he became very anxious and had to back out. He associated the



Rock'n'Roll life with his various addictions. However, this is because Pete had thought that if he could sort out his life he would stop drinking. He was surprised to find that it could be the other way around. He changed his mind and told Roger that he would appear on the tour. Pete felt proud of his performance, but others did not agree. Fans thought he was too old and not energetic enough, and Roger blamed him for not playing any hits. Despite this, Pete proved to himself that he could be a rock star without drugs and alcohol.

'Tommy' was still being turned into various live shows around the world, and Pete was very busy helping with these. There was even interest in 'Iron Man' from Disney and Warner Bros at one point. Then work on the 'Tommy' CDROM took Pete back to New York, where he started trying to salvage things with Lisa.

Pete was now working with a one-on-one counselor. At home he was living in the 'garden shed', the studio called The Cube on his property, as Karen did not want him in the house. Pete decided to buy The Wick, a grand house that Karen had never liked because it represented the 'rock star house on the hill.' Pete had always liked it. Buying it was an obvious statement that he was no longer living with Karen, and that a stage of their lives was truly over. This was the first time that Pete had really accepted that his marriage was not working, and rather than punishing himself for it, began to think about his life beyond Karen.



# Chapters 27 - 29, 'A New Home', 'Letter to my Eight-Year-Old Self', and 'Black Days, White Knights'

## Chapters 27 - 29, 'A New Home', 'Letter to my Eight-Year-Old Self', and 'Black Days, White Knights' Summary and Analysis

Now Pete's marriage was effectively over. Karen got the two family homes, and Pete lived at The Wick, converting the ground floor into studios and offices.

Pete played in a celebrity concert of "Quadrophenia", which essentially brought The Who back together, with John, Roger and Pete all playing together again. Pete traveled to the States to prepare for a US tour of "Quadrophenia", and one day met a girl called Rachel Fuller who worked as a music orchestrator. He was struck by her at once, and he felt determined that she would be part of his life. He left a note for the receptionist to pass on to Rachel to ask if she would be interested in working on orchestrations for The Who while on tour in the States. The tour was a blur for Pete. Critics said The Who had lost it, but Pete was enjoying himself and doing what he felt was best for the music, such as playing acoustic instead of electric guitar. One day he asked the receptionist if she'd passed the note to Rachel Fuller and she said no, because Pete had been flirting with her all week and then asked her to pass on a note to another girl.

Later, in London, Pete heard mention of Rachel Fuller again and instinctively knew that he had to be careful. He felt that Rachel had the potential to shake his world. Later, at a party, Rachel was there. She was friends with a girl called Laura that Pete had slept with a long time ago. Pete invited Rachel and Laura to spend time with him in New York. Laura thought that he still liked her, but he was more interested in Rachel, despite believing that she would be higher maintenance and potentially dangerous for him.

Finally he managed to take Rachel on a proper date and found that he liked everything about her. This was not just sexual attraction, but attraction to her as a person too. She was a lot younger than him, and so he felt she had the right energy to keep up with him. She was also a musician, and so would have less resistance to his way of life than Karen did. He decided to pursue a proper relationship with her. This was not the same addiction to sex and to the idea of love that Pete had exhibited previously; this was the real thing. Pete was beginning to mature and to find his path again.

By 1998 Pete had regained some kind of stability and happiness. He moved on from Faber, his children were all doing well, he had achieved closure with Lisa and his other ex-girlfriends, and he was excited about his new relationship with Rachel. Then one day he saw Rachel drunk and could not cope with how crazy it seemed to make her. She



admitted she had an alcohol problem and agreed that they should stop seeing each other while she received therapy for it. Pete's own alcohol issues had made him wary, and he was extremely frightened of either being sucked back in, or of having to cope with the effects of addiction in anyone again.

Some very important people in Pete's life died in quick succession: Linda McCartney, Karen's father, Ted Hughes (who worked on 'Iron Man' with him), and his Uncle Jack. These deaths shook him badly. He began to think about the people and the things that were important in his life. When he found out that John Entwistle was doing badly for money, he agreed to do another big, highly-promoted tour with The Who to help earn some money for him. At this time Warner Bros were also interested in 'Iron Man', and a film called 'The Iron Giant' was made. This was a beautiful film and Pete was pleased with it.

After her therapy, things were beginning to work again with Rachel. She came on The Who tour with Pete, and she helped to keep him sane and happy. He gave her a ring and pledged monogamy, and both of them have been very serious about their relationship ever since.

In 2001 John Entwistle died. He had been one of Pete's oldest friends and he found it hard to cope. The tour continued, so as not to let down the fans, but it was never the same, and Pete decided he did not want to continue with the band.

Pete had been getting deeper into charity work and was shocked to discover the extent of child pornography on the internet. This disgusted him, reminding him of the terrible effects his own childhood abuse had had on him. He decided to do something about it, attempting to raise awareness of the issue on his website. He researched the problem, including visiting several sites and even putting his credit card details into one, in order to see if the bank would let the payment go through. Later, David Blunkett, the Home Secretary at the time, proposed a change to the law to catch anyone who had ever used sites like this. At first it didn't even occur to Pete to be worried. Then he realized that he could be prosecuted simply for clicking and realized that he had made a big mistake. He had suffered from White Knight Syndrome, desperate to help but not thinking things through. Later, Pete found out that the Daily Mail had run a story that a billionaire rock star was among the list of people who had visited child porn sites. Pete knew this would be him.





# Chapters 30 - 32, 'Trilby's Piano', 'Intermezzo', and 'Who I Am'

## Chapters 30 - 32, 'Trilby's Piano', 'Intermezzo', and 'Who I Am' Summary and Analysis

Reporters, the major newspapers, magazine editors, etc, all began to show up outside Pete's house. Pete told Rachel to leave and protect herself, but she said that he had done nothing wrong and that they would face it together.

Pete received a lot of support from fans. There were some bad letters, but 80% were good. Roger completely supported and stuck by him too. The police were friendly and respectful at all times and they told Pete that he was obviously on their side, one of the 'good guys', but they still had to officially investigate him. Months of looking through his computers, photos and personal items ensued. Eventually he was informed that no incriminating evidence had been found, but that because he had used a credit card on one of the sites, he would either have to go to court or accept a caution. Pete could not face more months of stress and anxiety, so he accepted a caution. Now he thinks that he probably should have gone to court, partly to clear his name, and partly because it would have raised awareness for the charities dealing with these issues.

The accusations still arise now and again, such as amongst the protestors at the Miami Super Bowl in 2010, and Pete still has to defend himself, but there is now more-or-less a feeling that he has been vindicated.

After these dark days, Pete went on tour again with Roger, which was very successful. Pete is now writing songs for a new opera project, 'Floss', and Rachel's career is going from strength to strength. They are still together and in love today. This brings us to the present day.

In the last chapter, Pete looks back at his life and says that although he has been affected by how people judged him when they did not even know him, he is still grateful for everything he had and achieved. He may be rich and privileged now, but in his heart he's still a socialist and an activist, and this is where his sympathies lie. He now realizes that he does deserve the good things that happened to him, and he has learned to be more accepting of what life sends his way. Mostly, he is now finally proud of who he is.



# Characters

## Pete Townsend

This biography is about Pete Townsend and is told by him. Pete relates the events of his life from birth to present day, explaining his behavior and his feelings.

Pete is a famous rock star, a guitar player and song writer in the band The Who. He grew up in post-war Britain in a slightly unconventional family which did not always treat him very well. He felt neglected by his parents at points, and suffered sexual abuse while living with his grandmother Denny. Both Pete's parents were musicians, and Pete also soon became fascinated with music. He joined a school band, and later a band called The Detours while studying at art college. The Detours became The Who, and the band went from strength to strength, growing in success and fame.

Pete always felt that music was very special and that it had a kind of spiritual value. He believed that he was supposed to do something meaningful with music in his life, and he had a huge sense of self-importance. He seems to have believed that he could change people's lives through his music, but also that his audience could connect with him through music in some kind of meaningful way. Pete was therefore unsatisfied with simply playing commercial hits. As the band continued to gain success, Pete became more desperate and unhappy. He began independent projects, always searching for some elusive meaning that he could not find. He felt that he should be achieving something truly important, and when this did not happen he became even more anxious and worked even harder, filling all his hours outside the band with his side projects.

This put a serious strain on Pete's marriage to his childhood girlfriend Karen Astley. Karen tried to be understanding, but she found it hard to cope with Pete always being away and with his constant obsession with almost everything besides their marriage. Even two daughters and a son could not keep Pete focused on his family for long, though he did love them all deeply. They were not offering him the ultimate fulfillment that he was desperately searching for.

As Pete continued to search for something more, and as his marriage began to break down, Pete's behavior became more and more self-destructive. He took drugs and alcohol to numb his pain and frustrations, and soon became an addict. This is something that Pete battled with throughout his life. His parents were alcoholics, and Pete appears to have inherited from them a tendency towards addiction. Pete becomes addicted to many different things very easily, and not just alcohol and drugs. Many times Pete showed himself to be addicted to work, filling his time with it even more when he was trying to give up alcohol or drugs.

Pete also seems to have suffered from a kind of sex addiction, though this was more an addiction to the idea of love and relationships, which Pete seems to have confused with sex. This probably relates to his childhood when he was abandoned and abused. Pete



now finds it hard to trust people but conversely longs for love and support. Throughout the book he responds intensely when others have expressed love towards him. He became obsessed with any women who showed even the slightest interest in him, and he developed the idea that his music fans were somehow key to his spirituality and his soul. When it was clear that his marriage was failing, he clung on as long as he possibly could, terrified to give up the family love and support he so desperately needed.

Pete was not able to really address his problems with addiction until he recognized that it was his personality that was the problem - his self destructive behavior, his anxiety, and his slightly selfish streak. Pete went to therapy in order to uncover more about his past and how it had affected him. Pete saw the strong negative impact that the abuse of the past had had on him. Now that he understood his own rage and longings, and was able to rid himself of any lingering guilt for what happened to him, Pete could finally begin to rebuild his life and beat addiction.

Pete met a woman named Rachel Fuller who became a much better girlfriend for him. She was younger and had the right energy to keep up with his rock star life, but she also worked in the music business, and so could understand and sympathize with Pete better. She accompanied him on tours and helped him to keep a sense of perspective. He found that he was happier, and that he no longer needed to turn to drugs and alcohol as a kind of medicine for his misery. By the end of the book, Pete has come to understand himself much better, to accept who he is, and to finally find happiness.

Pete's relationship with the rest of the band members was often tempestuous, as they all had strong egos that came into conflict. Pete was the main song writer, and so he had some control over where the band was heading. He sometimes clashed with Roger Daltrey over this, who saw himself as the band's leader. Roger fought with Keith Moon constantly over his drug use and violent behavior. Roger was possibly the most normal of the four, and he was the one who always seemed to keep practical concerns and the band's interests in mind above everything else. Although Pete fought with both Roger and Keith, he formed a deep bond with them, and later he came to realize how much he loved them. John Entwistle had been Pete's oldest friend, and Pete was heartbroken when he died. The Who became like a second family to Pete, offering him the support and friendship that he needed so badly. Like a family, they argued often, but like a family they would always be there for each other.

## John Entwistle

John Entwistle was the bass player for The Who and one of Pete's oldest friends. Pete and John went to the same school and joined a band there together. This band did not develop into anything big, but a mutual interest in music was established. Later, they both joined Roger Daltrey's band The Detours, which became The Who. John remained a good friend to Pete throughout his life.

John is one of the quieter members of The Who in this biography. Roger was the band leader, the singer, and the womanizer. Keith Moon was the rebel who used too many



drugs and liked to smash hotel rooms. Pete was the songwriter and the arty one, the one who was always trying to drive the band to push their limits. John appears to have gone with the flow most of the time, and seems to have avoided some of the more explosive arguments that the other band members had with each other.

John was very good friends with Keith Moon, and the two used a lot of hard drugs together. Both Keith and John died young because of this. John also had more money problems than the other members, perhaps because he did not have as many side projects, or perhaps because he was more flashy with the money he did earn from The Who.

## Roger Daltrey

Roger was the leader of the band The Detours, and it was he who invited both John Entwistle and Pete Townsend to join. The Detours later became The Who. Pete and Roger were childhood enemies, after an incident in which Pete called out Roger for bullying behavior. Roger showed himself able to put the past behind him, however, and had clearly grown up a lot since then. He also proved time and again that he took the band extremely seriously. He invited Pete in despite past differences; he rejected a beautiful girl without a second thought when she told him to choose between her or the band; and it was Roger who always made sure the others turned up for practice and for gigs. The others all accepted Roger as the band leader without question.

Roger was always concerned with the kind of music that The Who were producing. He was respectful and encouraging of Pete, but he would speak up if he thought their sound was veering in the wrong direction. Like Pete, he did not want The Who to be too commercial, but he was not quite as extreme as Pete about innovating and doing something both spiritual and meaningful with music. Roger and Pete sometimes argued over the music and where The Who should be going, and occasionally Roger blamed bad reviews or performances on Pete not writing or wanting to play hits. Once, when the pair were arguing very badly, Pete's legal adviser in New York, Ina, advised Pete to let Roger win for once. Pete saw the wisdom in this and allowed Roger complete control over where the band was to go. This helped to ease the tension between them and was good for the band as a whole too.

Roger was the most steady of the four band members, being less into drugs, alcohol and violent behavior. He would often argue with Keith about his destructive behavior. This does not appear to have been because Roger had moral reasons for being against drugs, but because it was bad for the band. When heavily drugged up, Keith's music and performance suffered, and Keith's behavior also cost the band a lot in damages and bad publicity. Some of the worst fights in the band were between Roger and Keith, but the two still loved each other deep down, and Roger respected Keith's drum playing.

Roger was a bit of a womanizer and was constantly sleeping around with fans and girls he met at shows. He had a large ego, which tended to clash with Keith's as the two constantly attempted to outdo each other. Roger was the most conventionally good-



looking, and he also obtained work as an actor in films outside his work with the band. He and Pete liked to keep up with the latest trends, to cut their hair and to dress accordingly.

## Keith Moon

Keith Moon was the drummer for The Who. He was accepted into the band after the previous drummer Doug Sandom quit because he was deemed too old by Fontana, who were willing to offer The Who a record deal if Doug was not in the band. At first Keith was wary of the other band members, but he soon formed a deep friendship with John. Both had very carefree and slightly wild personalities, and they took hard drugs together. Keith constantly argued with Roger over drugs and his destructive behavior, which Roger saw as bad for the band. The two also clashed over their egos, as they were constantly trying to outdo each other and compete for girls.

Keith was having bad personal problems, as he constantly worried that his wife might be cheating on him while he was away with the band. This fueled his aggressive behavior, his infamous smashing of hotel rooms, and his pursuit of drugs and sex while on tour with the band. Pete notes that Keith was not necessarily a violent man, but that by smashing hotel rooms he released his pent up fears and frustrations, and tried to take his mind off worrying. Once Keith had a reputation for this kind of thing, he played on it, but it was not necessarily who he really was. Underneath it all it was clear that he loved the band and his band mates dearly, and that they were perhaps the only people who offered him any kind of support.

Keith was the craziest and most volatile of the band members. As his drug use got worse and worse and as he appeared to sink deeper into trouble, Pete flew out to America, where Keith now lived, to try to intervene. Keith agreed to return to London, where Pete helped him to rent a flat. Unfortunately, Keith died soon after. This shook the other band members badly. They agreed to continue without him, but it was never the same.

## Pete's Mother

Pete's mother was a singer in a war time band during World War 2 that became known as The Squadronaires after the war. She met her husband, Pete's father, in the band. When Pete was born she quit singing but continued to act as a manager for the band. Pete accompanied them on the tour bus and to holiday camps where they performed.

Pete remembers his mother as a bit of a flighty, selfish woman, who seemed to care more about her own happiness than about her son. It is obvious from Pete's account that she acted like a bad mother in several respects. She sent Pete to live with her mother, Denny, when she was worried that Denny might be exhibiting signs of dementia. Sending Pete to deal with this rather than going herself was incredibly irresponsible, but Pete's father did not question the decision. Pete blames his mother for



sending him to Denny, where he was sexually abused, and for failing to see that there was something very wrong.

Pete views his mother, and to a certain extent his father too, as a parent who acted selfishly and was not willing to put a child's happiness over their own. This may have something to do with living through a world war, and so having a desperate sense of needing to enjoy life before it was all over. The war also created a generation who tended to deal with problems by denying them, or by trying to cover them up with drink, music, entertainment, etc. Pete thinks his parents were too busy worrying about themselves to look after their son properly. This is the reason for a lot of Pete's pent-up rage and fears of abandonment.

Pete's mother was not happy in her marriage and she started to see another man, Dennis. He got her pregnant and she had several back-street abortions. She planned to move away with Dennis and Pete, which Pete's father initially agreed to, but when Pete's father changed his mind, she decided to stay. It is clear that Pete resented his mother for this whole thing, blaming her for almost breaking the marriage and the family. To the reader, it is clear that Pete's father was as much to blame. When Pete's father told his wife that she would have to leave Pete behind if she moved away, she immediately cancelled her plans, broke things off with her lover, and tried to make things work with the husband who had made her unhappy enough to want to leave. Although Pete never seems to have been able to accept it, this does show a great amount of love for Pete, and a willingness to put him before her own happiness after all.

Pete's mother was an alcoholic who became worse in later life. When Pete's father died she tried to commit suicide several times. Eventually Pete checked her in to rehab.

## **Pete's Father**

Pete's father played music in a war-time band that entertained the troops, where he met Pete's mother, who sang for the band. After the war the band became known as The Squadronaires and played at various gigs and holiday camps around the country. He was proud of his music and his career, but curiously reluctant to see any musical promise in his own son. Perhaps Pete's father felt that his musical career had never made him happy, and so hoped for something different for his son. Perhaps he feared his son eclipsing him, and hated the thought of Pete becoming involved in the music that eventually spelled the end of his own kind of music.

Pete looked up to his father a great deal, but he was disappointed that his father never really provided a good role model, or the kind of support that Pete needed. Pete's father, like his mother, seems to have been a little too wrapped up in his own problems to notice any of Pete's. He struggled with his marriage, eventually having to overlook his wife's affair in an attempt to bring his family back together. The only way he could do this was through drink, and both he and his wife became alcoholics. Pete's father eventually died of bowel cancer.



## **Denny**

Denny was Pete's maternal grandmother. Pete was sent to live with her when his parents were afraid she may be suffering from dementia. Denny was cruel and strict with Pete, and subjected him to sexual abuse from her many male visitors. Pete has never been able to forgive Denny and remembers her with hatred.

## **Richard Barnes, Barney**

Pete met Richard Barnes, nicknamed Barney, in 1963 while at art college. He became a life-long friend and The Who's main biographer. Pete lived with Barney for a while, but their flat was a complete mess and eventually Kit begged Pete to move out and live with him instead.

## **Helmut Gorden**

Helmut was The Who's first manager. He was a single man who wanted some excitement, and thought that getting involved with the band would be fun. He bought them a van and began to introduce them to major agents.

## **Doug Sandom**

Doug was the first drummer in The Who, but when Fontana offered a record deal on the condition that Doug leave the band, because they thought him too old, Pete cold-bloodedly encouraged him to step down. Doug did so, but he was hurt by it. He had been a good friend and mentor to Pete, and had stuck up for Pete in a similar situation earlier, though this was unknown to Pete at the time. Pete now regrets this deeply, but this is what got The Who their first real break.

## **Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp**

Kit and Chris heard The Who play and initially decided to make a film about them. They then decided that they wanted to manage the band completely, and bought The Who from Peter Meaden and Helmut Gorden for £200, a very large sum at the time. Kit and Chris have since been dubbed the fifth and sixth members of The Who. They became good friends with the band members, and Kit in particular helped support Pete in his musical goals for a long time. Eventually Kit succumbed to heroin addiction and Pete was forced to turn to others to help produce the band's music. Kit and Chris remained loyal to the band, though they did not always make the best decisions concerning royalties and money.



## Mike Shaw

Mike was hired as The Who's production manager during their time playing regular gigs at The Marquee. He was a very nice man who everyone loved. Unfortunately, he had an accident in which he fell asleep at the wheel and ended up paralyzed from the neck down. He could no longer do physical work for The Who, but he still sometimes accompanied them on tour, and he remained a good friend to the band members.

## Anya

Anya was an older woman and personal assistant to Kit, who seduced Pete and had a sexual relationship with him. He feels that he learned a lot from her, but Kit disapproved, feeling that she was using Pete unfairly, and he put an end to it.

## Karen Astley

Karen was an old friend of Pete's from art college who came to see several of Pete's shows. After 'My Generation' became a hit they started dating. Pete eventually married her, and they had two daughters and a son together. Unfortunately, though they loved each other dearly at first, Karen did not cope well with Pete's rock star career. Pete spent a lot of time away from her, and a great amount of time engaged in other projects. He seemed to always be putting work above family. While away on tours Pete took drugs and drank too much alcohol, and he also had several affairs. Pete was attempting to cope with unhappiness and anxiety, and blamed himself for what he was doing to Karen but could not stop. Even when it became clear that the marriage was failing, Pete clung on as long as he could because he was desperate not to lose this feeling of family, love and support that he had never had as a child. Eventually, however, they separated, and Pete now has a new girlfriend.

## Shel Talmy

Shel was a song producer for The Who. He paid them shockingly feeble royalties, and eventually Kit and Chris took him to court. They lost the case, and so were forced to pay Shel a huge amount before he would release The Who from their contract with him.

## Jimi Hendrix

Jimi Hendrix is a famous musician who played guitar and sang. He had a huge influence on Pete, who went to see his concerts regularly with his friend Eric Clapton.





## Eric Clapton

Eric Clapton is a famous musician who was very good friends with Pete. Eric and his wife suffered from terrible drug addiction until Eric's friends and father-in-law stepped in to try to save them. Eric managed to come off drugs but his wife could never manage it, and she died young. Eric asked Pete to help him persuade George Harrison's wife Pattie to leave George. Eric was successful, and he and Pattie were much happier together.

## Paul McCartney

Paul McCartney is a very famous musician and was one of the members of the band The Beatles. He was a huge influence on and a good friend to Pete.

## Bob Pridden

Bob was the chief sound engineer for The Who and still works for the band today. He recorded the band playing live at several concerts. He was a very good friend to Pete, and Pete regrets the times that he might have been mean or unfair to Bob.

## Meher Baba

Meher Baba was an Indian wise man whose spirituality Pete admired. Meher Baba regularly visited the western world to promote his ideas, and he wrote several books and essays. Pete found his work and his ideas very important, and he has been a Meher Baba follower for most of his life. Although the other band members sometimes teased Pete for this, Meher Baba's spirituality did influence a lot of Pete's and The Who's music, including the album 'Tommy'.

## Emma and Minta

Emma was Pete's oldest daughter, and Minta was his second daughter and middle child. Pete loved his daughters but could never devote enough time to them because he allowed his work and his various obsessions to get in the way. He regrets that he was not a better father to them at times. Now both children are grown up and have successful careers of their own.

## Joseph

Joseph is Pete's son and his youngest child. For a while he brought Pete and Karen back together into a rocky and tense relationship, but although Pete loved spending time with his son, he could not fix his marriage.



## Wiggy

Wiggy was the production manager for The Who. He started as Keith and John's driver, moved to looking after lighting, then dealing with things such as booking hotels and making travel plans, and eventually became full production manager. Pete found him dedicated but a little wild and insane. For a time he and Pete took drugs together.

## Bill Curbishley

Bill took over management of The Who in 1974. Roger adored him, but it took Pete a little longer to be able to trust him. Bill quickly began to understand the band and what motivated its members. He worked hard to try to cultivate good feeling and to make sure the members were all getting along. He was a fan of the music without being intimidated by the band members. He also managed money matters better, and the band had no more money worries after Bill took charge.

## Sam Sylvester

Sam was a show business lawyer who Pete turned to for help with the legal issues surrounding the film version of 'Tommy'. He became Pete's adviser in all legal affairs, and soon became a trusted friend.

## Ina Meibach

Ina was Pete's legal adviser in the States. She soon became good friends with Sam Sylvester.

## Ronnie Lane

Ronnie was Pete's friend and the bass guitarist in The Small Faces (later The Faces). He decided to quit The Faces because he could not bear working with Rod Stewart any longer. Pete offered to do an album with Ronnie, which they called 'Rough Mix'. Pete told Ronnie all about cheating on Karen and his guilt for it, and Ronnie told him that he was clearly trying to drive Karen away and that he would destroy her. Ronnie was right but Pete was angry and lashed out at him, knocked him over and could have killed him. Ronnie was weak from the early stages of multiple sclerosis, though Pete did not know this at the time.

## Kenney Jones

Kenney was the new The Who drummer after Keith died. Pete pushed to have him made an equal member of the band, earning the same as everyone else. Although



Kenney fit in with everyone else, Roger was never sure about him, fearing that his skills with the drums were not up to Keith Moon's abilities.

## **John Bundrick, Rabbit**

John, nicknamed 'Rabbit', was a rock keyboardist and pianist who worked with The Who. Although he was not an official or full member of the band, he played on several The Who albums and singles, went on tour with them, and played with them during Live Aid. He was a good friend of Pete's.

## **Theresa Russell**

Theresa was a beautiful actress in the film 'Bad Timing', directed by her husband Nic Roeg. Pete visited her and took her to a concert, then tried to sleep with her, but she refused him. Pete remained obsessed with her for a while, though he now regrets his behavior towards her and his betrayal of Nic.

## **Louise Reay**

Louise was another woman who Pete fell for, but his love was unrequited, and his obsession almost drove him to insanity.

## **Lisa**

Lisa was an American girl who Pete met at a party while in the US. He had an affair with her during the period in which he was the most unhappy and desperate, relapsing into alcoholism again, and becoming more and more distant from Karen. Pete broke up with Lisa to try to get his life back on track, then briefly dated her again after attending rehab. Eventually he left her and managed to achieve full closure.

## **Rachel Fuller**

Pete met Rachel while in New York preparing for the 'Quadrophenia' tour. Rachel was a music orchestrator, and Pete asked the receptionist to pass on a note asking her to help with orchestrations during The Who's tour. Unfortunately the jealous receptionist put the note in the bin instead. Later Pete saw Rachel at a party, and he invited her and her friend to stay with him. Pete sensed straight away that Rachel could be someone important to him, but at first he was wary of being hurt again. He took Rachel on a date and fell for her, realizing that he loved her personality as much as her looks.

Rachel was a lot younger than Pete and so had the right energy to keep up with his rock star life. She was also involved in the music business and so understood its demands better than Karen. Pete was sure that she would be a good partner for him. She

accompanied him on tours and helped to keep him grounded and happy. He gave her a ring and they pledged monogamy, and they are still together today.



# Objects/Places

## Post-war Britain

Following World War II, British people began to rebuild their lives after the terrors of air raids, rationing, loved ones' deaths, and constant fear. Pete remembers it as a time of optimism, but also a slightly selfish time in which people focused on their own happiness and tried to repress or deny anything bad. The older generation did not want to face the mistakes of the past, but the younger generation wanted to deal with these and then look ahead to the future. The working classes had more freedom and hope than ever before, as they could now look for opportunities beyond what their parents had always done. The music at this time began to express the anger, determination, hope and battle for freedom that the youth were experiencing.

## World War II

From 1939 to 1945 there was a war known as 'The Second World War' or 'World War II'. Many of the countries of the world took part, fighting on one of two sides. Britain and the countries of the British Empire were allied with France and others, and later the USA (this side was known as the Allies), against Germany and its allies, which had taken over most of Europe. Britain was bombed heavily during the war. Eventually the Allies won.

## Rock'n'Roll

Rock'n'Roll was a style of music that originated in America in the 1950s with artists such as Bill Haley and Elvis Presley. It grew out of styles such as Blues, Gospel music, Jazz and Swing. This was one of the styles that Pete listened to and that influenced him, though he was never particularly impressed with the popular music of the day, preferring some of the more innovative musicians. Nowadays Rock'n'Roll can refer to a wider range of music that has emerged from the different styles of the past, more generally called 'Rock'.

## Swing

Swing was a style of Jazz music that emerged in the 40s, and was what Pete's father played in the war-time and post-war band The Squadronaires. Swing music had a lilting rhythm and a fast pace that could be danced to. Pete's father approved of the new Rock'n'Roll music that was emerging during his son's youth because it had a similar 'danceable' style. Swing music tended to feature a lot of brass instruments and some woodwind, and occasionally violin or guitar, though guitar was not yet really popular in the early 40s when Pete's father was playing. This is perhaps why he does not let himself see Pete's own skill on the guitar.



## R&B

R&B or RnB stands for Rhythm and Blues, a style of African-American music that emerged in the 1940s. It has been described as a kind of rocking jazz music with a persistent beat. The term R&B has had several shifts in meaning over the years, and in Pete Townsend's book it should not be confused with what R&B has come to mean today. Pete uses it to refer to styles of popular music that developed from Electric Blues, Rock'n'Roll, and Soul music. In the British R&B scene, for example, The Rolling Stones were often referred to as R&B.

## The Who

The Who is the band that Pete Townsend is a member of, playing lead guitar and writing songs. It developed from The Detours, with a name change forced by the fact that there was already a band called The Detours. There are two members who have always been with the band: Roger Daltrey, the band leader and singer, and Pete Townsend. John Entwistle was with the band from the beginning but died in 2002. The original drummer was Doug Sansom, who left the band because record producers thought he was too old. He was replaced by Keith Moon, who stayed with the band until his death in 1978. Kenney Jones stepped into Keith's role on the drums after his death. The Who is an incredibly famous and successful Rock band.

## 'It Was You'

'It Was You' was the first song Pete wrote. It was recorded and played by The Naturals. It was not a huge hit, but it gave Pete the confidence to write more songs for The Who.

## Mods

The Mods were a youth group that emerged in London in the 1960s out of the Teddy Boy subculture. Mods liked fashion, dance moves, and R&B. They were very different from the Rockers, and the two groups were often opposed. The term 'Faces' referred to the fashion leaders in the Mod scene, with 'Numbers' as the lieutenants of the style, who adopted the fashions and spread them to the ordinary kids, the 'Tickets'.

## Rockers

Rockers were a youth group that emerged in the 60s alongside the Mods, out of the Teddy Boy subculture. They were more machismo than the Mods, preferring motorcycles, a more rebellious look, and an anarchist style.



## The Rolling Stones

The Rolling Stones are an extremely famous and successful band that were big around the time The Who was beginning to emerge into the music scene. The Who supported The Rolling Stones in December 1963 at Putney. This had a strong effect on Pete.

## The Kinks

The Kinks were another band who The Detours supported, and The Kinks were another of Pete's music influences. They had a more androgynous and wry style than other bands, which Pete admired.

## Fontana

Fontana is a record label that began in the 1950s.

## 'A Quick One, While He's Away'

'A Quick One, While He's Away', was one of The Who's songs, inspired by Pete's past with Denny and with hints of the sexual abuse he suffered there.

## Woodstock

Woodstock was a huge music festival and rock concert in the U.S., the first of its kind that inspired thousands like it. It put together the biggest acts of the time. Pete remembers it as being full of mud and drugs, with a heavily charged atmosphere. The Who's performance was very successful, and Woodstock became something of a legend, with each act who played there taking on a kind of mythic status. The Who were rocketed into Rock aristocracy and have remained there ever since.

## 'Tommy'

'Tommy' was an early album from The Who, which collected songs under a theme and told a story with them. The album used one main character across the whole album: Tommy, a deaf, dumb and blind kid. 'Tommy' was not received well at first, but it became a phenomenally successful performance, as it worked so much better as a live show. 'Tommy' has been made into many live shows, an orchestral album, an orchestral show, and even a film.



## 'Lifehouse'

'Lifehouse' was an idea for a dystopian story that Pete wanted to make into an album and project similar to 'Tommy'. He hoped to heavily involve the audience in the creation of the music, and in so doing achieve a kind of 'perfect note' and spiritual fulfillment. Unfortunately, no-one else really understood Pete's dream, and the 'Lifehouse' project never really took off.

## 'Quadrophenia'

'Quadrophenia' was a The Who album, a double album with sides written and curated by each band member, to display who all of them were and to make them feel like a unit again. This was a very optimistic album for the band. It was told through the eyes of one hero, Jimmy, across all four sides of the album. Later, like 'Tommy', 'Quadrophenia' was adapted into live shows.

## Punk Rock

Punk Rock emerged in 1977 as a very strong force in music, threatening to overtake The Who and make them look like 'rock dinosaurs' unless they managed to keep up. Pete found it hard to compete with Punk because it spoke to the youth in a way that The Who could no longer do. Punk reflected the current rage, a sense of betrayal, and the nihilism of the working classes, when so many were on the dole, there were strikes all over the country, and the Thatcher government was coming into power. Punk helped the youth to express their anger and desperation, just as The Who's kind of music had helped the youth of their day to express their hopes for the future and their own freedom.

## Live Aid

Live Aid was a huge charity rock concert held in 1985 to raise money and awareness for those starving in Africa. It was arranged by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure. Pete performed at Live Aid with The Who, even though the band was technically not together at this point. Charity work was very important to Pete.



# Themes

## Addiction

Addiction is a major theme running throughout the book and through Pete's life. Many of the important people in the book battle with different kinds of addiction. The first we see are Pete's family. His mother and father appear to have had a drinking problem very early on. They drank together, and as a way to cope with unhappiness in their lives. Neither of them was entirely happy in their marriage, and they had lived through a frightening world war. Drinking helped them to manage these problems, but also seems to have been a method of keeping their failing relationship working and their family together. Eventually Pete's father died of bowel cancer and his mother tried to commit suicide several times. Seeing that her drinking was out of control, Pete checked her into rehab.

Addiction is, unfortunately, hereditary, and children of alcoholics are much more likely to become alcoholics themselves in later life. This was the case for Pete. Pete suffered with his own alcoholism. His drinking did not become hugely problematic until The Who had become very successful and he was married with a child. This is the time that Pete should have been happiest, but instead he felt unfulfilled. He was desperate, feeling as though he did not deserve any good things that came his way while simultaneously feeling that these were never enough for him. He had a strong sense of his own importance, convinced that he was supposed to do something meaningful with his life and his music, and so when this continually failed to happen, Pete turned to alcohol as a way to cope. As he became unhappier and his marriage began to fail, Pete drank more and more. He admits now that he used alcohol like a medicine, trying to cure his depression and anxiety with it.

It took Pete a long time to realize that alcohol was not his problem. He was the problem. Pete had an addictive personality, as well as a tendency towards selfish and self-destructive behavior. When Pete was not drinking too much he was using drugs, and when he was not using drugs he was filling every minute with work. Pete's addictive personality is a constant presence throughout the book. He easily becomes addicted to drugs, alcohol, work, sex, fame, and love. He quickly becomes obsessed with people, and he becomes intoxicated with the idea of falling in love, possibly because love seems meaningful and important, whereas a stable family life is less exciting and less earth-shattering.

Pete was pursuing a hedonistic lifestyle, and yet never seeming to actually find pleasure in the things he pursued. He seemed to be enamored with the idea of himself as something between a rock star and guru, seeing himself as someone who could change others' lives with his music. His ego fueled his search for something beyond what he had, and this search fueled his addictions. This led to unhappiness, which he tried to cure with more of everything - more sex, more drugs, more alcohol, more work. This



only made him unhappier. Through this book, Pete shows addiction as an unhealthy downward spiral into misery and oblivion.

If Pete was to cure himself of these issues, then he needed to address what was really the problem; his attitude. Pete tried many times to quit his various addictions, successfully coming off drugs only to succumb to alcohol, then weaning himself off alcohol only to take on too much work and slide back into unhappiness, and then treat this with more alcohol again. It was only with the help of therapy that Pete was able to see his own self-destructive attitude, tracing it back to feelings of abandonment and the abuse of his childhood. Tellingly, it was not until Pete attempted to deal with his past, and to get his life back on track by no longer lying to himself, that he managed to curb his addictive tendencies. Pete managed to see that he needed a partner who would understand the demands of his music career, and who would have the energy to keep up with him. Karen made him feel like he was being torn in two, but Rachel moved with him. He also began to balance his work with The Who and his own personal goals much better. He is now clean of alcohol and drugs, but the fight was not easy, and temptation will always remain. Pete's journey shows that an addict must always stay strong, for a lapse can so easily become a complete relapse.

Pete is not the only person in the book who deals with addiction. Many of Pete's friends also faced a similar problem. Keith Moon and John Entwistle used hard drugs, and both died young. Pete's good friend Eric Clapton nearly died from heroin addiction, but with help from his friends he was able to come off the drugs and find happiness again. Eric's wife, unfortunately, could never deal with her addiction healthily, and she also died. Many other rock stars used drugs, some more recreationally than others. Pete paints a picture of the lifestyle of a rock star almost necessarily including drugs. This is partly because of easy access, partly due to the expectations and the need to cultivate a certain image, and partly because of the stresses of the rock star life. Almost all the musicians Pete talks about had major problems in their personal lives, or unhappiness that they were unwilling to deal with. The ones who successfully beat their addictions did so through rebalancing their lives.

## Music and Social Change

When Pete documents the ways in which music changed over his career, he does so in terms of social changes. Music, society, politics and fashion are all inextricably linked, and music will tend to reflect the attitudes of the time. When Pete was born, his parents were involved with a band that had entertained the troops during World War 2. Now, in post-war Britain, music was used as a means of escape and pure entertainment, a way to drown out worry and regret. Swing was very popular, a form of music that allowed people to dance and forget their troubles.

However, as Pete was growing up, a lot of changes were happening in Britain. The idea of 'Youth' was emerging, and for the first time the concept of the teenager was being created. The Youth were the young people of Britain who had been born after the war, who wanted to face the mistakes of the past that their parents were burying and



refusing to acknowledge. The Youth wanted to be open and free, to explore new ideas, whereas the older generation just wanted to be happy and for things to go back to normal after the war years. By the time Pete was playing, music was about expression as well as entertainment. It spoke of freedom and change, and of hope for the working classes, who now had greater opportunities than their parents had ever had.

As The Who began to emerge, the Youth groups in London were mainly split into Mods and Rockers, the first very fashionable and arty, and the second more machismo. Pete leaned towards the Mods, and The Who began as a Mod band. In the early years they were influenced by a great range of different styles: R&B, Blues, Jazz, Rock'n'Roll, popular music, psychedelic music, eastern influences, classical, and more. Pete gives the impression that this was a time for great innovation in music, as the world was discovering something new and was determined to shake off the past, to evolve and move on.

Music at this time was also quite angry. The Who expressed this through loud guitar and auto-destruction on stage. This helped their audience to release their own pent-up rage at the past and at their parents' generation, and their determination to make something new with the post-war world. For Pete, and for many more, this auto-destruction was more than a gimmick. It was cathartic for both band and audience.

As The Who became more successful, music changed constantly. The album began to become more important than the single, and the idea of theming an album emerged. The Who did this with 'Tommy' and other albums, creating a kind of rock opera that tied all the songs together with a single character and story. This reflected the idea that music should say something important, and though music was still seen largely as entertainment, it was clear that audiences wanted something a little more. They wanted to be moved by their music and to discover new things in it.

As Pete and The Who got older, their music began to feel less relevant. The youth of the late 70s and early 80s were facing a very different world. Whereas Pete's youth had been a time of optimism for the working classes, and his music focused on ideas of freedom and positive change, things were less pleasant for the youth of the day. The working classes felt as though they had been abandoned and betrayed, the Thatcher government was on its way in, more people than ever were on the dole, and strikes across the country reflected people's desperation. From this emerged Punk music, with its anger, nihilism and sense of distrust.

Pete's own music has endured because of its energy and its themes of freedom and expression, and because of the huge fame of The Who. The Who adapted to changes in society at different points, changing their sound but not the essentials of who they were and what they were about. The Who can also be credited with inventing or contributing to some of the major changes and innovations in music: the power chord, auto-destruction, the heavy guitar feeling of heavy metal, synthesized sound, strobe lighting at concerts, and more. All these things, along with their incredible performances on tour and at Woodstock, have earned them a place in the halls of Rock'n'Roll fame.



## Love

In the early chapters of the book, the reader might find it hard to believe that so much of Pete's journey is about love and discovering love. He had a difficult childhood, felt abandoned and let down by his parents, and suffered sexual abuse while living with his grandmother Denny. This left Pete with feelings of guilt and anger, a terrible fear of rejection, and the constant idea that he was not good enough. Though they did love him, Pete never really got the support he needed from his family.

Instead, Pete found support in his bandmates, though it was a long time before he would be able to see just how much they all loved each other. The Who came to be a second family to him, one that would be with him for the rest of his life. Pete's journey throughout the book is about finding love, from his friends and colleagues, from his fans, from his wife and children, and, eventually, from himself.

Pete's troubled childhood caused him to distrust people at first, and especially himself. He had a constant fear of abandonment, and a need to be loved and respected, perhaps because his parents had never shown him much pride or devotion. When Pete began to see how his music affected his fans, this naturally had a huge impact on him. His fans loved and respected him, and he was determined to be the best he could be for them. He became obsessed with the idea of making music meaningful for his fans, but also of how his fans could contribute to his music. He had found love, but was anxious for more, and was anxious to prove himself.

Pete also married his girlfriend, Karen, and for a short time they were happy. However, Pete always wanted something more, and Karen found it hard to cope with his addictive and self-destructive personality. Their love for each other was not enough to bridge the gap between them and they began to drift further apart. Pete had found love and had found a supportive family and now he was terrified of losing them. Even when it was obvious that Karen was not right for him, and that they were making each other miserable, he still clung on to their marriage for as long as he could.

As their marriage fell apart, Pete began to sleep around. He became addicted to the idea of love, to the feeling of excitement, meaning and support it added to his life. Having received less love than he should as a child, he longed for more and more of it as an adult. He mistakenly equated this with sex and relationships, moving from one woman to another in a desperate attempt to find something. If there was someone interested in him he found it hard to resist her, as the idea of another person wanting him spoke to the child in him who had been abandoned for so long.

Eventually, Pete was able to see that his behavior was not making him happy, and he attempted to find closure with his past girlfriends. Then he met Rachel Fuller, the woman he is still with today. She offers the love Pete needs. She is supportive, but she is also involved in the music business too, and so can understand what it means in terms of Pete's life. When he is with her he does not have to feel as if he is torn between two lives. He loves her for her personality, and finds their relationship much



more meaningful than all his flings. This is because he has found a healthy love rather than a pretend or desperate love, and he now finally feels accepted for who he is.

Pete was surprised to find love in his band too. At first, Pete had been unable to take the band seriously, and throughout his career he had fought with every member of the band. However, in later life Pete came to see how important they all were to each other. He loved every single one of them like a second family, and despite their disagreements they would all be there for each other like family. This is why they teamed together to help with John's money problems, why Keith broke down when he thought Pete was choking, why Pete was overcome when he realized how much he loved Keith back, and why Roger stuck by Pete throughout the sex scandal in which Pete was accused of buying child porn. Pete was struck by Keith and John's deaths as he would be by his own brothers' deaths. Now only Roger and Pete remain, and they will always love each other dearly.

Another important love that Pete came to discover was his love for himself. For a long time Pete never believed himself good enough, and a part of him felt guilty for the abuse of his past. Through therapy he was able to come to terms with this and to realize that his abuse was not his fault. He was also able to see that he should be grateful for the things he has in life, and that he does deserve them all. By the end of the book Pete has come to accept himself and take pride in his accomplishments. He is finally accepting of who he is.

The most important love in Pete's life has always been music. It was there with him from the beginning, when he first heard music in the air at the river as a child, and when his Aunt Trilby encouraged this creative side. His first experience at the river, of music being something ethereal and spiritual, also started a life-long love of water. Pete has never stopped pursuing either of these loves, and they have been the things that have kept him going throughout all his difficulties and trials. Music has been Pete's way of expressing himself and discovering himself, and through music Pete has found all the important loves of his life.

# Style

## Perspective

The biography is told from Pete Townsend's point of view, about his own life. The events are therefore biased towards how Pete saw them, and the book expresses his own opinions as to certain people's behavior and motives. Pete writes persuasively and reflectively, convincing the reader that he is being as honest as possible. However, Pete also wants the reader to like him, and from his work with Faber he has plenty of experience of how to persuade readers to share a certain point of view.

The book begins in the present tense, slipping into the past tense in the second chapter and then maintaining it throughout the book, with the occasional exception in sections told in the present when Pete is trying to capture a strong feeling of immediacy, or when he is inserting his own opinions or readings of the situation. The present tense beginning helps to grab the reader and draw them into the book, creating a sense that Pete is truly reliving this and that we are right there with him. This also blurs the past and the present right at the beginning of the book, reflecting the fact that everything Pete has done and experienced has made him who he is today.

## Tone

Pete's voice is very forthright and to the point in "Who I Am", giving the feeling that he has no time for modesty or for caring about what others think anymore. His account of his life, particularly his childhood and his struggles with addiction, come across as extremely honest and brave. At the same time, Pete presents the facts of his childhood in a way that will make the reader sympathize with his behavior later. This allows the reader to respect and admire Pete for his honesty, and to decide that we like him despite any faults. This will be effective later in the book when Pete desperately needs the reader to take his side and to believe that he is telling the absolute truth.

Pete gives just enough details from his childhood to show the ways in which he was not supported or cared for properly, but also to show that he was similar in many ways to other children. This makes him relatable but also lets the reader feel sorry for him. He briefly hints at abuse and then moves on, and then comes back to the subject many times, hinting a little more each time until he finally comes right out with the fact that he suffered sexual abuse from strangers in Denny's flat. This allows the horror of this situation to slowly dawn on the reader, emphasizing both how traumatic the experience was and how it has had such a lasting impact on Pete's life. This very effectively creates pathos, once again giving context for anything in Pete's life that might seem unlikeable.

The general tone of the book is of reflecting back on Pete's life from a position of acceptance and wisdom. The Pete telling the story has come to terms with his past and understands himself better. He can now see why he did the things he did, and he can



even criticize or laugh at himself. The style is not conspiratorial or gossipy, or even funny, but completely open. Pete does not write as if speaking to his fans, but as if he is speaking to everyone, and the book is therefore just as accessible for those who are not familiar with Pete Townsend or with The Who. There is also a feeling of catharsis, as if Pete needed to get a lot of this off his chest in order to be freed from the demons of the past.

## Structure

The book begins with one of The Who's first major gigs, when Pete first smashed his guitar and began a tradition of auto-destruction. The first chapter reflects on what music meant to Pete and how it was an expression of the feelings of the youth in general. The first chapter also sets up foreshadowing for later in the book, as it hints that Pete's music would destroy his father's music, and perhaps also hints at the violence, drugs and rock star lifestyle to come.

The book then goes into past tense and begins with some information about Pete's parents, before moving on to his birth and events of his childhood. The book then documents Pete's life and the progress of the band in chronological order. Each chapter has a title that is either significant to Pete's frame of mind at the time, or that reflects where The Who's music was at at the time. However, the chapters themselves are not themed in this way, continuing with the events in the order they happened. This is a very open approach that simply and honestly lays down Pete's life as it happened, only occasionally drawing back to make judgments.

The final chapters sum up where Pete's life is now, and how he now feels about himself and his music career.



## Quotes

"In the interval between two world wars, sophistication, glamour and light-heartedness obscured an underlying fear of extinction." Chapter 2 - 'It's a Boy!', p9

"The truth is, though, that my experience of felling alone, different, alien, was much more 'normal' than I realized." Chapter 3 - 'You Didn't See It', p28

"After decades of dealing with military threats, our parents now faced a danger from within. 'Youth' was what it came to be called." Chapter 4 - 'A Teenage Kind of Vengeance', p38

"Of course we understood. We were the innocent victims of a struggle between the old and the new." Chapter 5 - 'The Detours', p50

"The Kinks were playing quite a few of the same R&B songs that we did, and they somehow managed to be poetic, wistful, witty, wry and furiously petulant all at once. Along with the Stones, I will always regard them as a primary influence." Chapter 5 - 'The Detours', p60

"But when we played our first few shows in real Mod strongholds, like the Aquarium at Brighton, or The Scene Club, where pep pills and beautifully dressed young rent-boys were openly for sale, our Mod garb combined with that aggressive noise allied us to a very powerful new idea in pop culture: the elegant, disciplined, well-to-do, sharply dressed, dangerously androgynous yobbo." Chapter 6 - 'The Who', p71

"I was only eighteen and was motivated by artistic visions as well as the usual pop-star dreams: money, fame, a big car and a gorgeous girlfriend." Chapter 6 - 'The Who', p71

"For me these feelings coalesced in a conviction that the collateral damage done to all of us who had grown up amid the aftermath of war had to be confronted and expressed in all popular art - not just literature, poetry or Picasso's Guernica. Music too." Chapter 6 - 'The Who', p72

"All good art cannot help but confront denial on its way to the truth." Chapter 6 - 'The Who', p72

"I saw pop artists as mirrors of their audience, developing ways to reflect and speak truth without fear." Chapter 6 - 'The Who', p72

"But with Jimi there was something else: he married the blues with the transcendent joy of psychedelia. It was as though he had discovered a new instrument in a new world of musical impressionism." - on Jimi Hendrix. Chapter 9 - 'Acid in the Air', p109

"We advanced a new concept: destruction is art when set to music. We set a standard: we fall down; we get back up again." Chapter 9 - 'Acid in the Air', p115





"Everything I am and have done for myself, all my artistic work, was rooted in the British way of life, the two world wars and the hidden damage they had done to four generations. I knew I'd never leave Britain. My roots were too deep." Chapter 11 - 'Amazing Journey', p152

"Pop music was evolving, becoming the barometer for a lot of social change." Chapter 12 - 'Tommy- The Myths, The Music, The Mud', p167

"From this point forward, my life was often fraught with the paradox of success and creativity." Chapter 13 - 'Lifeline and Loneliness', p192

"All the piss-taking I got from the band about following Meher Baba made it clear that what couldn't be accommodated in The Who gang was my spiritual longing, my increasing concern that I lacked purpose." Chapter 15 - 'Carriers', p235

"He knew the rigors of war first-hand: he had been bombed, blitzed, and had performed military service in both the Royal Air Force and the post-war merchant navy. But he had little sense of the next generation's post-war shame and anger, or the way our parents' denial of those feelings might need to be confronted by us, and cast aside." - referring to Ken Russell's attitude to making the film of 'Tommy'. Chapter 18 - 'The Undertaker', p276

"But a band isn't a unified fellowship, it's an uneasy, sometimes competitive merger of young men with divergent ambitions who've agreed to play music together." Chapter 19 - 'Growing into my Skin', p298

"As an artist, performer and songwriter I could no longer pretend to have a viable patron among the young. 'My Generation' was comfortably moving towards their forties, living in middle-class affluence or - disturbingly - in cardboard boxes around the Waterloo area, only half a mile away from London's wealthy West End." Chapter 21 - 'The Last Drink', p340

"In this surge of hope and optimism, The Who set out to articulate the joy and rage of a generation struggling for life and freedom. That had been our job. And most of the time we pulled it off. First we had done this with pop singles, later with dramatic and epic modes, extended musical forms that served as vehicles for social, psychological and spiritual self examination for the Rock'n'Roll generation." Chapter 21 - 'The Last Drink', p340-1

"However, by the late 1970s, at the tail end of years of Labour government in Britain, just before the Thatcher Conservative government quadrupled the dole queues, it was the Punks who were able to express the nihilism, fury and contempt of a new generation of youth, betrayed and thrown onto the scrapheap." Chapter 21 - 'The Last Drink', p341

"I am proud that what I do provides jobs, and although I am wealthy and privileged, in my heart and my actions I am still a socialist and activist, ready to stand by the underdog and the beaten down, and to entertain them if I can." Chapter 31 - 'Who I Am', p502



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the theme of addiction in this book. Who has an addiction and to what? What causes addiction and how can it be beaten?

In what ways has Pete been affected by his childhood? Consider his unconventional lifestyle as the son of two musicians, neglect and abuse, the attitude of his parents, and his school-life. How have his childhood experiences informed the ways in which the adult Pete behaved?

How do the changes in music over time relate to cultural and social changes?

Pete often describes his behavior as self-destructive. Why do you think Pete continued to act in ways that made him miserable or that ruined his relationships?

In what ways are the other members of The Who like a second family to Pete? Do you think they mean more to him than his biological family? In your answer you should consider all the people who supported and worked for The Who as well as the four main musicians.

What did being a rock star mean to Pete and to other important musicians in the book? How did it change their lives for the better or for the worst? Why do you think so many rock stars encountered similar problems?

Regarding the sex scandal that centered around Pete, why does Pete describe his behavior as acting like a 'White Knight'? What does he mean by this? Why do you think Pete did what he did, and do you think he handled the fallout correctly?

In what ways does Pete change throughout the book? What lessons does he learn? How is the Pete who is narrating events different from the Pete he is telling us about?

Pete's biography is written in a persuasive style. In what ways does Pete attempt to persuade the reader to like him and to see his side of situations?

Do you like Pete? Give reasons, with examples, for your answer.