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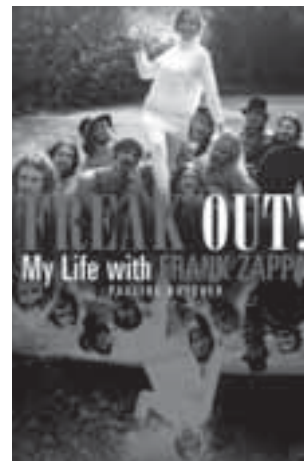


~ FREAK OUT! ~

My Life with Frank Zappa - Pauline Butcher

By Helen Marketti
Photo Credit on Book Cover - Ed Caraeff

In 1967, Pauline was working as a typist and printer in a London office, on a rainy afternoon, when she answered a call from Royal Garden Hotel where the concierge asked for a typist for Mr. Zappa. Little did Pauline know at the time how much her life would change once she took her portable typewriter over to the hotel, met Mr. Zappa and began transcribing his song lyrics. Prior to this meeting, Pauline had no idea who Frank Zappa was and had never heard of him. Pleased with her work, Frank invited Pauline to work for him and live with his family in Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles. She spent three years with the Zappa family and their ongoing entourage. Pauline had an amazing journey of growth, love, loss, and rock n roll freedom.



breeze in to my office a few minutes after some fracas between us and ask if I would like to go shopping with her, or would I like a piece of cake she had just made. This totally floored me and I never knew where I stood with her.

You had mentioned that having worked for Frank Zappa should not "define" you. You felt that you are whom you are and having worked for him should not be a deciding factor. Did you feel you lost any of your identity from that experience?

When I returned to England and was recovering from an operation on my ears, I became irritated by the fact that everyone wanted to know about my time with Frank Zappa. After we left Cambridge and moved to Scotland, I never mentioned Frank Zappa's name again for twenty years. No one in

Scotland knew I had worked for him. We were raising our family and it was the happiest time of my life.

When we returned to England and I began teaching psychology to 16-18 year old students, I brought Frank Zappa's name into my lectures because I knew it would grab their attention, but still socially, I omitted the Zappa story. It was not until I started writing in 2002 and struggled to get a play broadcast on BBC radio and a producer told me to write something that no one else could write. I realized the only story that no one else could write would be my experience living and working with Frank Zappa. It was then that I finally relented and brought Frank Zappa back into my life, so you are right; once again, he is central to it.

I always wanted to be a writer and Frank was the first and only person, until I met my husband, who ever encourage me to write. It's a paradox though that in order to live out my dream, I have had to use the Zappa story and mine. So now, I am back in the thick of it again by promoting the book on Facebook.

What were some of life's lessons from having gone through such an experience? You certainly emerged from those years a changed person.

When I went out to Hollywood in May of 1968, I was a very right wing, rather prim young girl, but capable of great fun though it was several months before I showed this side of my character. In the beginning, I remained aloof and felt like I was locked in with a bunch of teenagers although most of them were older than I was. Gradually I got drawn into their way of life and became as much a part of the scene as everyone else. By late 1969, it was no longer possible for me to remain objective in

What was it about Frank's music that you felt was unique?

There was no one else who combined rock n roll, jazz, doo-wop, classical, comedy, satire and downright outrageous songs, and all with amazing precision of performance. No one else held such control of his audience.

Did you feel Frank's style of music was beyond the "Mothers of Invention" to grasp?

Frank felt that the music he was writing in 1968 was beyond the skills of the Mothers of Invention and tried at that time to break up the band. They solved this problem when Ian Underwood - a classically trained pianist and saxophonist - agreed to rehearse the group and teach them their parts when Frank wrote new compositions. Gradually, however, over the course of the next eighteen months, Frank became more and more dissatisfied and finally broke up the group in late August of 1969.

You seemed overall to have established good rapport with Gail (Frank's wife) over time even though I know there were tense moments and it felt like a competition with each one of you were trying to get footing and a place of purpose, correct?

I was constantly vying with Gail over my job. She saw herself, I think, though nothing was said, as Frank's assistant and I was her underling. I, of course, saw myself as Frank's secretary with no need for Gail in between. Frank made no attempt to rectify this situation and I never dared raise it with him, so as a result, Gail and I were constantly at loggerheads over opening the mail and which fan mail to show to Frank, fighting over who should book the studios or make phone calls on his behalf and so on. Yet, Gail was very canny. She would

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my letters home and this fact is reflected in the book – the first 200 pages cover five months at the log cabin, and the final 100 pages scoot through the next three years.

Of course, I changed - I became hippy-fied, wore less make-up, let my hair get straggly and dressed in jeans and t-shirts instead of neat little dresses. Politically I changed too. Women's lib hit the front pages in 1970 and I was mesmerized: 'Love me less, respect me more' became my dictum. I realized I need no longer spend my life as a secretary, I could become a journalist, my dream job and I applied to UCLA to take their course in journalism. This was much against Frank's ideals because he scorned journalism courses and thought I would be turned out like a robot asking the same boring questions as everyone else. However, I had picked up the American ideal that with the help of a university education, you too could become president of the United States, or if not the president, a journalist at least.

What do you want fans/readers to know about Frank?

First, he was not the drug-crazed hippy that his image seemed to imply. In fact, he never took drugs and no one was allowed anywhere near the house with them. He stayed in a different hotel from his bands because he was afraid the police would catch them and he would be jailed with them.



Pauline with Frank Zappa (photo credit: Ed Caratti)

Secondly, his songs are very contentious, songs like, 'Don't Come In Me,' 'I'm Harder Than Your Husband,' 'Catholic Girl', 'Jewish Princess,' to name but a few, so you would expect when you met him that he would be a very contentious, conflict-ridden sort of person. He wasn't. He couldn't have been more the opposite. He was quietly spoken, polite, and the thing that I liked about him most was that he listened very closely when you spoke. To me this was a revelation. In 1967 when I first met Frank, women were treated like bimbos and their views in general disregarded. Yet here was Frank Zappa acknowledging my every word and paying close attention. I was hooked.

However, the other side of that was I had very few occasions when I was alone with him – three private audiences in the five months we lived at the log cabin. The rest of the time, others always appeared, particularly his wife, Gail. He rarely stopped for idle chatter because he spent all his days' non-stop working. Except for daily three-hour rehearsals with the band, he never stopped composing at the piano and jotting down the compositions on music sheets at his desk. In between, he would sit and listen to the blues or jazz or classical music – never rock n roll. During these sessions, he would invite people to join him but you were not to talk, only listen. So

his life at home was almost monastic. Other times, he would be in the studio recording and finishing off albums. In between those periods, he would be writing film scripts, filming or editing the films. As soon as his day's work was done, he would sleep until he got up the next morning and began all over again. You can see there was almost zero time to socialize.

In contrast, his life on the road was busy with rehearsals, concerts, press interviews, travel and groupies. Typically, he spent six months on the road, and six months at home. During concert tours, he taped conversations with the band and used some of these in his albums. Other than that, he tended not to socialize with them but remained alone, or with a groupie.

Is there anything else that you wanted to mention or discuss?

There is one other crucial factor about Frank Zappa that is rarely mentioned - he was a first-class businessman and a wizard at promotion and publicity. In the early days, he advertised in comics that he designed himself and had outrageous photographs taken in order to grab

publicity. None of his music has ever been played on the radio yet he sold thousands of albums, made a lot of money and is revered in the rock business as a pioneer and influential innovator. This factor I think is missing from so many would-be musicians who want to be famous and make it big in the

music world. He was always in charge and his manager did what Frank told him to do, not the other way round.

I had no work visa when I went out to Hollywood but he solved that problem in his usual calm way. After consulting a lawyer, it was agreed that I should be put on the books as a songwriter and at the end of the year, my salary written off as a loss-making song. This gave me time to apply for a proper green card.

He was extremely intelligent and had a formidable memory, remembering everything people told him and what he read in letters. He never watched TV (although this changed much later) I never saw him read a newspaper or a book. He had apparently taught himself everything he knew before he was famous in the library.

How can people get in touch with you?

I have two pages on Facebook: Pauline Bird is one; and Freak Out! My Life with Frank Zappa by Pauline Butcher is another. They may also e-mail me at paulinebutcher@live.com

Where can your book be purchased?

The book can be purchased at Barnes & Noble in the US or on amazon.com. I also have copies here in Singapore that I can sign and send if people e-mail me.

Can Karaoke Help?

I'm often asked that question because I once ran a business where karaoke was a staple for fun for the customers and continued growth for our business. Karaoke kept our business from going under during the roughest years of the economic downturn. We offered it on commonly slow nights because it brought regulars in who showed up faithfully each week, bringing family and friends to hear them sing and eventually get up and sing themselves! These singers would send pictures of themselves singing to their friends and then suddenly a party of two became a party of four or six.

From those original karaoke nights came other business such as catered parties (WITH karaoke because this is a great activity to make any party a blast or even just keep the kids busy while the adults watch them and talk). We would host fundraisers where folks would dare each other to sing songs, paying dollars to the fund as the person accepted the dare. Family parties were often rebooked from one birthday to the next because of memorable duets, "dress like your favorite rock star" themes and from that came theme nights like "Glee" or "Musicals" or "Rat Pack." These would have our register ringing all night long because they needed to stay hydrated for all that singing. We sold wristbands to help with the costs of keeping our karaoke show going, but there are other ways to help make this a win-win offering for both the customer and the business owner.

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