

Lonnn Friend's *Sweet Demotion*

A writer's trek through the sacred and profane of rock & roll

BY ANDREW FISH PHOTOGRAPHY BRIAN LOWE



Lonnn Friend flew high on journalistic success, found discontent and career descent as a corporate VP, and discovered a spiritual groove in the aftermath. “When my career was at its peak,” the music writer recalls, “on any given week or month I would be traveling with a rock band.

I had access to the pantheon of high-volume, multi-platinum noisemakers.” As editor of RIP Magazine from 1987 to 1994, Friend chronicled the mayhem of the heavy-metal era. He gave Guns N’ Roses their first cover story and documented the making of Metallica’s *Black Album*, one of the top-selling records of all time. He flew on chartered jets with Kiss, Axl Rose, and Slash, had a spot called “Friend at Large” on MTV’s “Headbanger’s Ball,” and hosted a nationally syndicated radio show called “Pirate Radio Saturday Night.” With the fans as his priority, “I demanded exclusive photo shoots, which was unheard of for a metal magazine,” he relates. “I wanted them to look like heroes and ran double-page openings to articles, so it was eye-popping. And this is a Beatles kid who’s now green-lighting articles on Slayer and Carcass.”

With his family in mind, Friend departed RIP, a property of Larry Flynt Publications, for a lucrative yet ill-fated position as an A&R vice president at Arista Records. When his three-year stint came to a close in 1998, Friend found himself in an emotional and financial funk. Gigs like editor-in-chief at streaming radio station KNAC.com, and product manager at Interscope, where he worked with Peter Gabriel during the label’s reorganization, came and

went. As he hustled for work and struggled to find direction, Friend’s perspective shifted toward yoga and meditation. “While you’re falling apart,” he explains, “another part of what makes you who you are is coming together.” He moved to Las Vegas to write his first book, *Life on Planet Rock* (2006), an in-depth recollection of his RIP days, while freelancing for several local magazines, with “every dime I made going to my kid and keeping her in school, because my daughter, Megan, is the most important creature, ever, in my life,” he says with a broad smile.

Friend’s new memoir, *Sweet Demotion*, sets insightful narrative and flowing meditations on music alongside racy tales of decadence and excess after dark. Dubbed “rock & roll’s Forrest Gump” by comedian Patton Oswalt in the book’s opening pages, Friend has surrendered to Carl Jung’s concept of synchronicity, which has led him into all sorts of serendipitous adventures. His affinity for the number 11, for instance, bonded him with a Kundalini yoga practitioner, who on November 11, 1999 asked Friend to follow him into a garden to be a witness at the wedding of Carrie-Anne Moss and Steven Roy, which the guru officiated at 11:11 A.M. When Friend told this story to Rufus Wainwright just before a show, the singer suggested he tell it to Elton John, who was sitting nearby, which resulted in Friend and the legendary pop pianist’s chatting about The Who. “That story is a microcosm of how you can turn your own life events, as weird as they are, into prose,” remarks Friend, who closes his book with the several weeks he spent with Steven Tyler as they edited the Aerosmith frontman’s autobiography. “I keep having these life experiences, and if you don’t write about them, then why did you have them?” submits the rock scribe. “Why did the universe permit you these moments of chaos and clarity and anecdote? I hope that however off the path the book may seem at times, it’s still meant to connect the fan to a closer experience with the music. I’ve had extraordinary access, and if you’re given a place that close to the fire, then tell people about it. Tell people about it with reverence and color!” ▼

Sweet Demotion: How an Almost Famous Rock Journalist Lost Everything and Found Himself (Almost) is available at amazon.com.

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