

A Life in Parts

By Bryan Cranston

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A poignant, intimate, funny, inspiring memoir—both a coming-of-age story and a meditation on creativity, devotion, and craft—from Bryan Cranston, beloved and acclaimed star of one of history’s most successful TV shows, *Breaking Bad*.

Bryan Cranston landed his first role at seven, when his father cast him in a United Way commercial. Acting was clearly the boy’s destiny, until one day his father disappeared. Destiny suddenly took a backseat to survival.

Now, in his riveting memoir, Cranston maps his zigzag journey from abandoned son to beloved star by recalling the many odd parts he’s played in real life—paperboy, farmhand, security guard, dating consultant, murder suspect, dock loader, lover, husband, father. Cranston also chronicles his evolution on camera, from soap opera player trying to master the rules of show business to legendary character actor turning in classic performances as *Seinfeld* dentist Tim Whatley, “a sadist with newer magazines,” and *Malcolm in the Middle* dad Hal Wilkerson, a lovable bumbler in tighty-whities. He also gives an inspiring account of how he prepared, physically and mentally, for the challenging role of President Lyndon Johnson, a tour de force that won him a Tony to go along with his four Emmys.

Of course, Cranston dives deep into the grittiest details of his greatest role, explaining how he searched inward for the personal darkness that would help him create one of the most memorable performances ever captured on screen: Walter White, chemistry teacher turned drug kingpin.

Discussing his life as few men do, describing his art as few actors can, Cranston has much to say about creativity, devotion, and craft, as well as innate talent and its challenges and benefits and proper maintenance. But ultimately *A Life in Parts* is a story about the joy, the necessity, and the transformative power of simple hard work.

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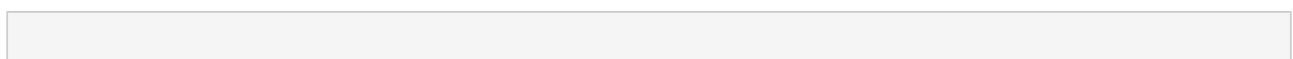
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Editorial Review

Review

"Boy, you think you know a guy! I worked six solid years with Bryan Cranston and figured there weren't any secrets left between us. All those hours I spent watching him wander the desert in his underpants? That alone should make me an expert on the man.

But now, along comes *A Life In Parts* – and suddenly I'm reading about a whole other Bryan, one who performs weddings in airplanes and camps out at mortuaries. This Bryan bathes in the blood of chickens and stuffs mackerels in air vents. He even accosts poor Alfred Hitchcock.

Yes, it's all in here. Better still, there's an exceedingly honest discussion of his craft, which will be a godsend to struggling thespians everywhere. Think your job waiting tables sucks? One of the world's greatest actors had it worse (what with being under suspicion for murder and all).

I loved this book. It's just the right mixture of funny, sad and heartfelt. If I'd known Bryan could tell stories this well, I would have had him writing episodes of *Breaking Bad*."--**Vince Gilligan**

"This splendid, moving, heartbreaking memoir is doubly triumphant. It regales and entertains while at the same time providing inspiration and practical wisdom. A truly gifted storyteller, Cranston captures the reader's imagination and emotions from beginning to end."—**Doris Kearns Goodwin**

"Bryan Cranston has created a cinematic record of how an actor shapes a career and an identity and a legacy all at the same time." –**Tom Hanks**

"The highs here—and there are many—are meth-less but addictive."--**Kirkus Reviews**

"[A] substantial memoir from one of Hollywood's most introspective stars...anyone interested in acting will devour Cranston's savvy advice about honing one's craft and building one's career."--**Booklist**

"By turns gritty, funny, and sad, this fiercely intelligent book from the *Breaking Bad* star defies celebrity memoir tropes."--**Entertainment Weekly**

"Cranston fuses his personal and professional life in a way that's nothing short of riveting....an engrossing first-person account by one of our finest actors."--**Huffington Post**

"[A] must-read memoir."--**Philadelphia Inquirer**

"A literary cup that runneth over: A candid portrait of a great actor."--**Newsday**

"Deeply personal...the way in which Cranston's simple, staccato prose invites readers to empathize with every 'character' he's played elevates this autobiography to more than just a look behind the scenes--it's a look behind a life."--**Publishers Weekly**

"Genial...funny...a book about ambition and persistence."--**The Washington Post**

"[Cranston] traces his on- and off-screen life with witty, absorbing candor."--*Denver Post*

"Superb."--*Chicago Tribune*

"Brilliant...[Cranston] has a knack for describing the ordinary in a way that makes it fascinating."--*The Buffalo News*

"Cranston delivers crisp stories about his onscreen performances in everything from daytime soaps to "Malcolm in the Middle" to his 2014 Tony-winning portrayal of President Lyndon B. Johnson in "All the Way." But he also offers many chapters in which the "part" is his real-life experience as a farmhand, hypnotist, dating consultant or even a murder suspect."--*Kansas City Star*

"Cranston's memoir is an illuminating window into the actor's psyche, as he opens up about his time as Walter White on the show and the fine line he walked playing that character—while looking into himself."—*People*

Fascinating...The candor and self-introspection of this book are reminiscent of another unflinchingly honest memoir, the late Katharine Graham's magnificent 'Personal History.'"--*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

About the Author

Bryan Cranston won four Emmy Awards for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series for his portrayal of Walter White in AMC's *Breaking Bad*. He holds the honor of being the first actor in a cable series, and the second lead actor in the history of the Emmy Awards, to receive three consecutive wins. In 2014 he won a Tony Award for his role as Lyndon Johnson in the bio-play *All the Way*. In film, Cranston received an Academy Award nomination for his leading role in *Trumbo*. Among his numerous television and film appearances, he was nominated for a Golden Globe and three Emmys for his portrayal of Hal in FOX's *Malcolm in the Middle*. He is the author of *A Life in Parts*.

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A Life in Parts

Walter White

She stopped coughing. Maybe she'd fallen back asleep. Then suddenly vomit flooded her mouth. She grasped at the sheets. She was choking. I instinctively reached to turn her over.

But I stopped myself.

Why should I save her? This little junkie, Jane, was threatening to blackmail me, expose my enterprise to the police, destroy everything I had worked for, and wipe out the financial life preserver I was trying to leave my family—the only legacy I could leave them.

She gurgled, searching for a gasp of air. Her eyes rolled back in her head. I felt a stab of guilt. Goddamn it, she's just a girl. Do something.

But if I stepped in now, wasn't I just delaying the inevitable? Don't they all at some point end up dead? And

poor dumb comatose Jesse, my partner, lying beside her. She's the one who got him on this shit in the first place. She'd kill them both, kill us all, if I stepped in now and played God.

I told myself: just stay out of it. When he wakes he'll discover this tragedy—this accident—on his own. Yes, it's sad. All death is sad. But he'll get over it in time. He'll get past this like every other bad thing that's happened to us. That's what humans do. We heal. We move on. A few months from now he'll barely remember her. He'll find another girlfriend, and he'll be fine. Fuck it. We all have to move on.

I'll just pretend I wasn't here.

But I am here. And she's a human being.

Oh God. What have I become?

And then, somehow, as she was fading, she wasn't herself anymore. I wasn't looking at Jane, or Jesse's girlfriend, or the actor Krysten Ritter. I was looking at Taylor, my daughter, my real daughter. I wasn't Walter White anymore. I was Bryan Cranston. And I was seeing my daughter die.

From the moment she was born in 1993—a bit premature, shy of seven pounds, impossibly beautiful—I felt an instant, radical, unconditional love that redefined love. I had never allowed myself to imagine losing her. But now, I was seeing it. Clearly. Vividly. She was slipping from me. She was dying.

That was not the plan. When I do the homework for such a delicate scene, I don't make a plan. My goal when I prepare isn't to plot out each action and reaction, but to think: What are the possible emotional levels my character could experience? I break the scene down into moments or beats. By doing that work ahead of time, I leave a number of possibilities available to me. I stay open to the moment, susceptible to whatever comes.

The homework doesn't guarantee anything; with luck, it gives you a shot at something real.

It was real fear that gripped me—my worst fear. A fear I hadn't fully expected or come to terms with. And my reaction is there, forever, at the end of that scene. I gasp, and my hand moves to my mouth in horror.

When the director, Colin Bucksey, said, "Cut," I was weeping. Deep racking sobs. I explained to the people on set what had happened, what I had seen. Michael Slovis, our cinematographer, embraced me. My castmates, too. I remember in particular Anna Gunn, who played my wife, Skyler. I hugged her. I must have held on for five minutes. Poor Anna.

Anna knew. As an actor she has a fragility at her core, and she often had a hard time shedding her character's emotions after shooting difficult scenes.

That will happen in an actor's life, and it happened to me that day. It was the most harrowing scene I did on *Breaking Bad*, and really . . . ever.

It may seem odd. It may even seem ghoulish. To stand in a room packed with people and lights and cameras and pretend I'm letting a girl choke to death. And then to see my daughter's face in lieu of that girl. And to call that work. To call that your job.

But it's not odd to me. Actors are storytellers. And storytelling is the essential human art. It's how we

understand who we are.

I don't mean to make it sound high-flown. It's not. It's discipline and repetition and failure and perseverance and dumb luck and blind faith and devotion. It's showing up when you don't feel like it, when you're exhausted and you think you can't go on. Transcendent moments come when you've laid the groundwork and you're open to the moment. They happen when you do the work. In the end, it's about the work.

Every day on *Breaking Bad* I'd wake up about 5:30 and have coffee, take a shower, get dressed. Some days I was so tired, I didn't know whether I was coming or going.

I'd drive the nine miles from my condo in Nob Hill to Q Studios, five miles south of the airport in Albuquerque—ABQ as the locals call it. I'd be in the makeup chair by 6:30. I'd shave my head anew. Knock down the nubs. It didn't take too long for makeup. By 7:00 a.m. we'd see everyone: the other actors, the crew. Then we'd start rehearsing.

The allotment was a twelve-hour shoot. Plus a one-hour lunch. So a normal day was thirteen hours. It was very rare that the day was shorter. Occasionally, it was longer. Some days went seventeen hours. A lot of it had to do with whether we were on location.

If it was just a minimum day, we'd wrap at 8:00 p.m. Then I'd grab a sandwich and apple for the road. I didn't want to take the time to stop. I'd call my wife, Robin, from the car. How are you? Yeah, long day. I'd see how she was doing. I'd ask about Taylor. I'd still be talking to her when I walked into the house. I'd say goodnight and then have that sandwich while looking over what we were doing the next day. I'd take a hot bath with a little glass of red wine. Then I'd hit the sack.

But even before the drive home, every night after we finished, I'd go in the hair and makeup trailer and take two hot, wet towels that my friends in the makeup department had presoaked, and I'd drape one over my head and I'd wrap the other over my face. I'd sit in the chair and let everything soak off, feeling all the toxins drain away. I'd sit until the towels went cold against my face, leeching myself of Walter White.

That day I saw Jane die—that day I saw Taylor's face—that day I went to a place I'd never been, I opened my eyes and stared through the scrim of the white towel into the light above. I'd put everything, everything, into that scene. All the things I was and all the things I might have been: all the side roads and the missteps. All the stuttering successes and the losses I thought might sink me. I was murderous and I was capable of great love. I was a victim, moored by my circumstances, and I was the danger. I was Walter White.

But I was never more myself.



Users Review

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