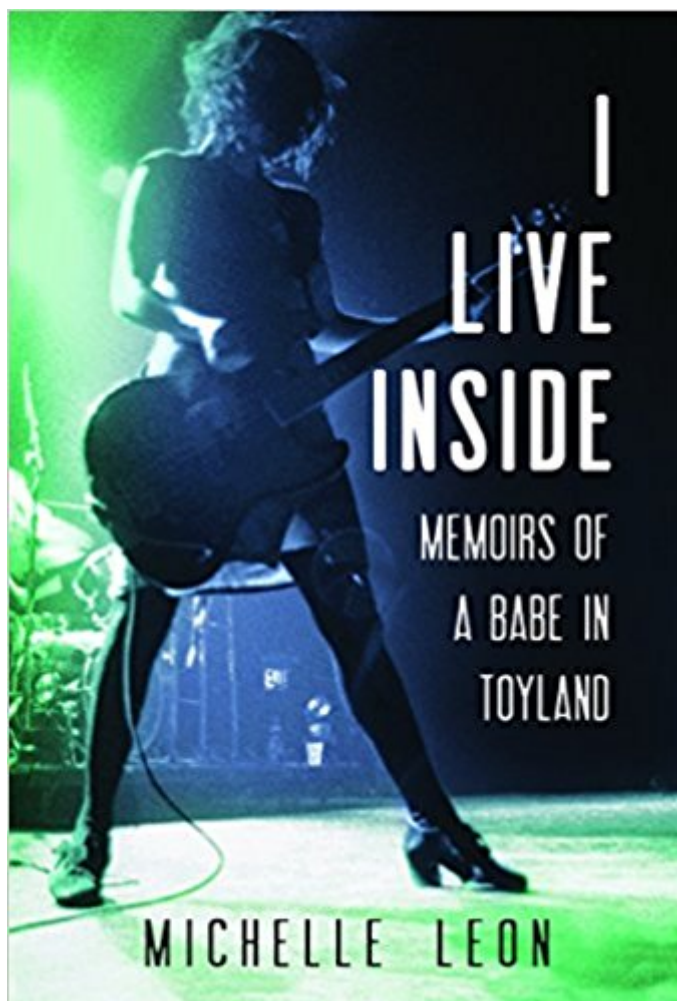


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# I Live Inside: Memoirs Of A Babe In Toyland



## Synopsis

Babes in Toyland burst onto the Minneapolis music scene in the late 1980s and quickly established itself at the forefront of punk/alternative rock. The all-female trio featured a shy, seventeen-year-old Jewish teen from the suburbs on bass guitarâan instrument she had never played before joining the band. Over the next few years, Michelle Leon lived the rock-and-roll lifestyleâplaying live concerts, recording in studios, touring across the United States and Europe, and spending endless hours in stuffy vans, staying in two-star motels, and sleeping on strangers' couches in town after town. The grind and drama of life in the band gradually wore on Leon, however, and a heartbreaking tragedy led her to rethink her commitment to the band and the music scene. Leon's sensitive, sensory prose puts readers right on stage with Babes in Toyland while also conveying the uncertainty, vulnerability, and courage needed by a girl who never felt like she fit in to somehow find her place in the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"...there isn't an obvious sentence in the book. Over a little more than 200 pages, Leon's short, self-contained chapters, often less than a page, are the opposite of diary entries: considered, honed, until every word has its own reason for being where it is." Greil Marcus on Pitchfork "An impressionistic account of tour buses, parties, backstage tension and on-stage exultation; Leon doesn't attempt an objective overview of the Babes' mission, and the book is a better read for it." Mojo "In a voice that is both dreamy and well crafted (Leon holds an MFA in creative writing), the ex-bassist fashions her short, nonlinear chapters in a way that is almost filmic, building scenes into

a beautiful account of both her band and the formation of her identity. She doesn't shy away from the sex-and-drugs part of rock & roll or the sexism, for that matter—but her book isn't a tell-all. Befitting its title, it takes its approach from experience: The narrative moves in and out of her time with the band, recounting milestones both funny (getting a fake id) and profound (the 1992 murder of her boyfriend, indie-punk roadie Joe Cole). The effect is visceral; at its best, Leon's prose allows readers to experience the personal and ineffable—including the transcendence she experienced when playing—putting us in a special and specific time and place in American music. "Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture" [I Live Inside] shares qualities and quality with Viv Albertine's autobiography on this side of the pond, being equally as compelling and arguably more elegantly written, deflating the clichés and myths of life in a band but coming out of the other side enriched from following a dream. —Record Collector

Babes in Toyland burst onto the Minneapolis music scene in the late 1980s and quickly established itself at the forefront of punk/alternative rock. The all-female trio featured a shy, seventeen-year-old Jewish teen from the suburbs on bass guitar—an instrument she had never played before joining the band. Over the next few years, Michelle Leon lived the rock-and-roll lifestyle—playing live concerts, recording in studios, touring across the United States and Europe, and spending endless hours in stuffy vans, staying in two-star motels, and sleeping on strangers' couches in town after town. The grind and drama of life in the band gradually wore on Leon, however, and a heartbreaking tragedy led her to rethink her commitment to the band and the music scene. Leon's sensitive, sensory prose puts readers right on stage with Babes in Toyland while also conveying the uncertainty, vulnerability, and courage needed by a girl who never felt like she fit in to somehow find her place in the world. Michelle Leon is a freelance writer, musician, and teacher. She was the bass player for the influential punk band Babes in Toyland from 1987 to 1992 and again in 1997. Her writing has appeared in City Pages, the music essay compilation The First Time I Heard David Bowie, Saint Paul Almanac, VitaMN, Haute Dish, and Your Flesh magazine. Michelle holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College. She lives on the east side of St. Paul with her husband, two children, and three dogs.

I knew that I had stumbled across something special the first time I heard Babes in Toyland. They were able to tap into that vein of musical synthesis that can occur when talented musicians come into such perfect harmony with each other that the music is elevated beyond what each may accomplish individually. The bassist (and author) Michelle Leon was a large part of that magic.

Seeing Leon play bass was an enthralling experience; even through video you could feel the enormous well of energy surging through her, electrifying the air around her with its intensity. Her departure was, possibly, the defining moment that led to the slow decline and eventual dissolution of the band. In this book she attempts to assimilate her experiences with Babes in Toyland with her own life, past and present, in a deeply personal and hauntingly beautiful fashion. *Live Inside* is composed as a series of vignettes, encapsulating moments in time from the beginnings of the band through her tumultuous departure and beyond. Her craft of language is engaging, her descriptions flitting from dripping with poetry to stripped bare within a breath, a dance between keen observation and penetrating self-awareness. Leon feels present in every word, especially in the raw humanity of her unflinching attempts to integrate these chaotic years into something cohesive, something that can be understood. Interspersed throughout the book are memories culled from her childhood, ranging from the idyllic to the burningly shameful, that relate to the issues of growth and self-identity (among others) that haunted Leon as a young musician. These interludes appear on pages which are aged and creased, as though retrieved from the bottom of the family's old wooden trunk in the attic. They allow the reader to participate in the typically private experience of someone else's emotional memories, those formative experiences that flood back into us at moments of self-reflection or the right trigger—a rare achievement, even in the world of memoirs. The book is a rather quick and light read, though the scattered chunks of empty space between its components certainly lends to the tone of contemplative integration beneath it all. It's certainly worth the time of any fan of Babes in Toyland and good enough to hopefully help create some new ones, as well.

Really well written! Not your typical autobiography style of storytelling that's been written down. Lots of evocative imagery and descriptive passages that really resonates with me. I lived in the Uptown area of Minneapolis around the same time period, and actually saw Leon with Babes in Toyland at the Uptown Bar. This book captures that time and place perfectly. The flashback chapters also really bring back a lot of memories that so many people from that era living in Minnesota can relate to.

Whether you are a fan looking for an inside peek of what it was like to be a part of one of the most fascinating bands of the late 80's early 90's, or simply a fan of memoir, you will not be disappointed. Michelle Leon's writing will pull you into a world where the senses are magnified. You will feel the dirt, boredom and tension of touring in a van and the disappointment

and hurt of adolescent rejection. You will smell the perfume, fresh cut flowers and sweat, and see things you may not ever be able to unsee (spoiler alert, that dude in the dirtbag hotel window). Even as things get dark, there is always humor, insight and introspection to guide you into the light. It was impossible to put down and I read it in one sitting. Highly recommended.

A compelling and beautifully written book. Poignant, and honest, she draws you in and doesn't candy coat the seemingly glamorous life of touring musician. Her story will make you laugh and cry, as she works through a devastating heartbreak, to eventually find her true artistic calling. A book that you won't want to put down!

As a university student back in the early 1990s, I was a big fan of alternative music / indie rock, and reading Michelle Leon's experiences brought that time back to me. This is an excellent memoir, extremely well written and absolutely engaging. I was enthralled with each and every page, and the experiences and recollections Michelle describes completely captivated me. And I especially love how she essentially alternates between her childhood experiences and her experiences in Babes in Toyland. I know I'll be reading Michelle's memorable memoir time and time again.

I thought this book was beautifully written. I was actually glad that it wasn't a chronological "and then this happened, and then THIS happened" sort of memoir, as I find those rather boring. It is actually a collection of vignettes that tie together beautifully, once I got started reading I found it hard to put down! Michelle is very honest and I think strikingly kind as she shares her impressions of what it was like to be in this band at such a pivotal time, both for her and for so many others who were scraping by making music/art in the early 90s. It's full of humor, but there are also some very poignant memories shared. I found it very moving and related on many levels to a lot of what she shares here. I imagine it is not easy to write a good memoir. I say this because there are so many lousy memoirs out there...this isn't one of them. :) I hope she writes more books, she clearly has a gift for story telling!

Compelling, relatable, stunning and touching memoir. I Live Inside is thoughtful and moving. I highly recommend this book to music lovers, musicians, fans of Babes in Toyland and or general readers alike.

Excellent book by the original bassist for Babes. The author reflects on her time with the band and

all the experiences (both good and bad) that occurred. A very interesting read and a hell of a lot better than Neil Karlen's "Babes in Toyland: The Making and Selling of a Rock Band".

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