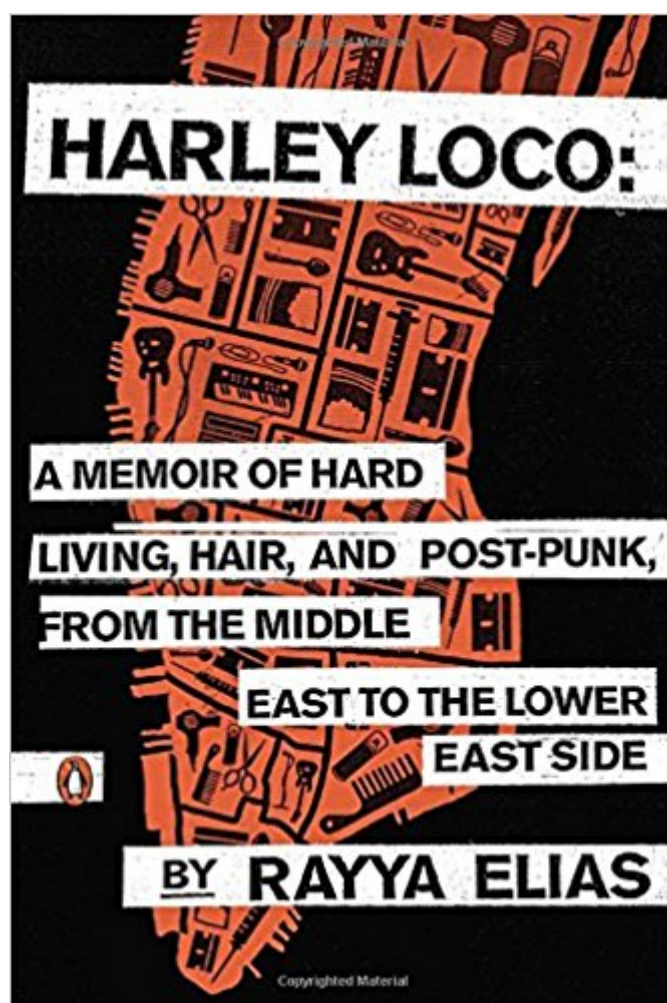


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# Harley Loco: A Memoir Of Hard Living, Hair, And Post-Punk, From The Middle East To The Lower East Side



## Synopsis

âœTerrific. . .Rayyaâ™s stories blew mine away.â• âœ Elizabeth GilbertâœA classic, blood-stained love letter to bohemian NYC.â• âœ Craig MarksWhen she was seven, Rayya Elias and her family fled the political conflict in their native Syria, settling in Detroit. Bullied in school and caught between the world of her traditional family and her tough American classmates, she rebelled early. Elias moved to New York City to become a musician and kept herself afloat with an uncommon talent for cutting hair. At the height of the punk movement, life on the Lower East Side was full of adventure, creative inspiration, and temptation. Eventually, Eliasâ™s passionate affairs with lovers of both sexes went awry, her (more than) occasional drug use turned to addiction, and she found herself living on the streetsâ”between her visits to jail. This debut memoir charts four decades of a life lived in the moment, a path from harrowing loss and darkness to a place of peace and redemption. Eliasâ™s wit and lack of self-pity in the face of her extreme highs and lows makeÂ Harley LocoÂ a powerful read thatâ™s sure to appeal to fans of Patti Smith, Augusten Burroughs, and Eleanor Henderson.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** This is not easy reading. In fact, quite often the authorâ™s behavior is so stupidly self-destructiveâ”and blatantly Â- selfishâ”that one is tempted to give up on her. And yet you read on. In a memoir of darkness and, ultimately, redemption written by a gay ex-junkie, ex-con, musician, hairdresser, and filmmaker, Elias offers a unique literary voice (the title refers to the

nickname she was given in Rikers prison). In 1967, at the age of seven, she emigrated from Syria to the U.S. with her family. While growing up in the Detroit area, she was bullied by her American classmates; she felt alienated and like a prisoner in her own skin. But there was one thing that made her feel tough and cool in people's eyes: drugs. Hers is a violent and humiliating tale of time in rehab and detox centers and prison stints as well as numerous love affairs with both men and women, followed by eviction after eviction until, homeless, she had no place to go. Elias paints an indelible portrait of New York City, especially the East Village, during the bad old days of the 1980s, when every street corner seemed to be inhabited by hookers and drug dealers. A memoir few readers will soon forget. --June Sawyers --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

“Elias’s spiky, punky memoir takes us from her idyllic Syrian childhood to her plunge into sex, drugs, rock’n’roll, and more drugs in New York City’s East Village.” -- Elle “More than a memoir, Elias’s tale “from Syria in the 1960s to New York in the 1980s” offers a street-level snapshot of some of history’s most critical time periods. Through her intimate storytelling, we get a glimpse into the highly personal struggles of addiction and the powerlessness of those caught in its grip.” -- Bust Magazine “Rayya Elias’s life reads like Huck Finn on heroin. Her story of fleeing Syria as a child, growing up in Detroit and spending her young adulthood trolling around the East Village is as American as they come, including as it does immigration, addiction and hard won deliverance. Through it all Elias’s voice burns fire hot and is completely engaging.” -- Darcey Steinke “Rayya’s writing doesn’t come out on the page feeling like it was squeezed from a standard-issue literary toothpaste tube. Instead, her stories are like tough little stray creatures, born in the lowest hollows of the dirtiest street corners, which then “as you watch, breath held” fight their way to rapture.” -- Elizabeth Gilbert “Rayya Elias’s Harley Loco grabs you by the throat on the very first page, and then never stops shaking you -- even after you’ve closed the book. It’s a punk song disguised as a memoir: raw, slashing, gritty, and shot through with all the wild confusion of youth. But it’s also wise, unpredictable, and relentlessly affecting.” --Jonathan Miles From the Hardcover edition.

I read this memoir because Rayya is the partner of a favourite writer, Elizabeth Gilbert. I knew of Rayya’s recent health struggles and that she had lived an extraordinary life that took her from a rock star junkie to the insightful, inspirational figure she has become. Though it is not particularly well-written and could have benefitted from more/better editing, I found this book fascinating. It is true that Rayya here offers little insight and is boldly unapologetic. I imagine that she has more than

made amends to the loved ones she hurt during the many years that she was abusive to herself and those around her. I can't relate to much that Rayya writes about, yet for me that made it all the more interesting. How does someone keep making the same mistakes, and why? How can a person with so much talent and promise throw it away? The answers aren't here but Rayya's incredible story is. If you are curious, you should read it.

From the website: "This debut memoir charts four decades of a life lived in the moment, a path from harrowing loss and darkness to a place of peace and redemption." In what world is continuously shooting heroin/cocaine and using and abusing friends and family called "living in the moment"? I found this poorly written memoir to be repetitive and self-congratulatory. Very little insight. Doing drugs like a rock star does not make one a rock star.

I liked this book, but it's not an easy read--years of drug addiction and at risk behavior make for uncomfortable feelings in me as a reader. I kept wondering, how long before things start looking up for Rayya? The do...eventually. The most memorable scenes are when Rayya is questioned in the hospital by her "dying" mom, and the Riker's Island prison scenes.

I chose a five star rating because I hated having to put this book down while I tended to life's chores. I read it in a day around doing some odd jobs but I certainly only wanted to be absorbed in the pages of this book. Rayya tells an honest raw story of an honest raw woman. I enjoyed reading this memoir and thank you Rayya for the day I spent along your path, I'm a better person for it :)  
much love xo

An interesting life. An interesting journey. As easy as it is to create our own hell, we can just as easily create our own freedom. It's up to us to decide. Rayya Elias' story can easily inspire all of us.

Easy read considering English is not my first language. I liked the stories she uses for the reader to understand who she is and where she comes from. I got a bit bored and frustrated after reading page after page of her neverending vicious drug problem. at some point it becomes too much and you just want to move on and get to the end.

I heard Rayya interviewed in Australia and her warmth and humour made me want to discover more about her life. The book is well written, captures the imagination and gives insight into people living

with dependencies and coping on a daily level. I'd recommend it to anyone with an interest in reality.

I went into this memoir expecting to like it. It's about a time and place that I know well, and seems to take on issues with which many of us have or do grapple. However, the deeper I got into the book, the more I saw that the book itself is not deep. There's not nearly enough real, critical self-reflection here, and the narrative, overall, isn't solid. It reads like a series of short ideas that have been stitched together.

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