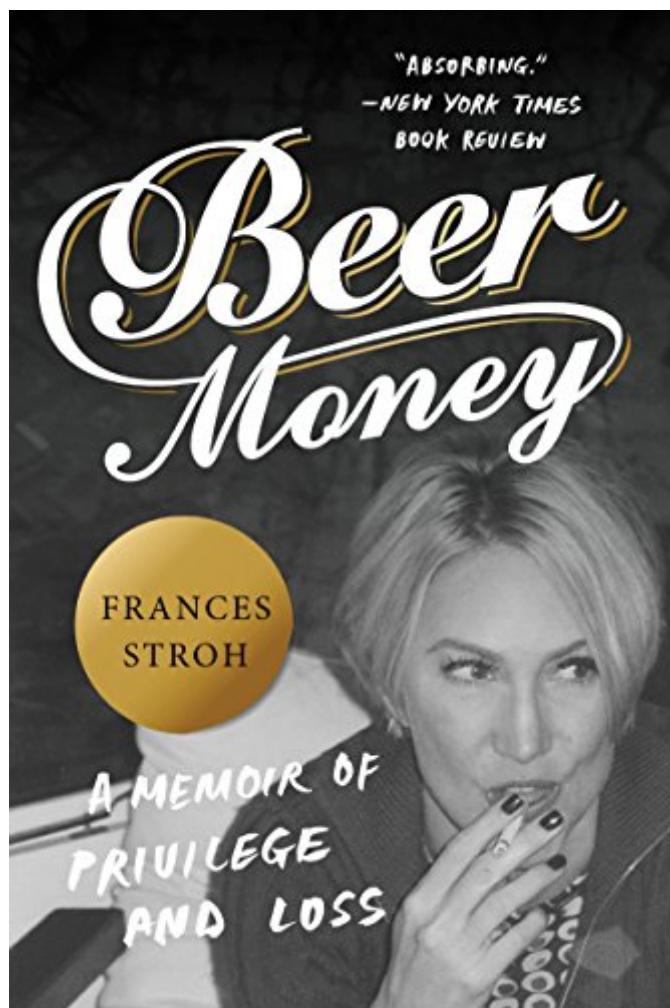


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Beer Money: A Memoir Of Privilege And Loss



Synopsis

In the tradition of Rich Cohen's Sweet and Low and Sean Wilsey's Oh the Glory of it All, a memoir of a city, an industry, and a dynasty in decline, and the story of a young artist's struggle to find her way out of the ruins. Frances Stroh's earliest memories are ones of great privilege: shopping trips to London and New York, lunches served by black-tied waiters at the Regency Hotel, and a house filled with precious antiques, which she was forbidden to touch. Established in Detroit in 1850, by 1984 the Stroh Brewing Company had become the largest private beer fortune in America and a brand emblematic of the American dream itself; while Stroh was coming of age, the Stroh family fortune was estimated to be worth \$700 million. But behind the beautiful facade lay a crumbling foundation. Detroit's economy collapsed with the retreat of the automotive industry to the suburbs and abroad and likewise the Stroh family found their wealth and legacy disappearing. As their fortune dissolved in little over a decade, the family was torn apart internally by divorce and one family member's drug bust; disagreements over the management of the business; and disputes over the remaining money they possessed. Even as they turned against one another, looking for a scapegoat on whom to blame the unraveling of their family, they could not anticipate that even far greater tragedy lay in store. Featuring beautiful evocative photos throughout, Stroh's memoir is elegantly spare in structure and mercilessly clear-eyed in its self-appraisal "at once a universally relatable family drama and a great American story."

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Customer Reviews

I did not want to put this book down. Stroh writes with a unique mixture of tenderness and brutal honesty, and her portrayal of her family and the environment around them is incredibly nuanced. She is never self-indulgent or maudlin but she does expose the unhealthy mixture of secrecy and shame that enveloped her family and contributed to its demise. That being said, the book is anything but depressing. What shines through again and again is Stroh's resilience, courage, and good humor as she navigates her way through adolescence, college and early adulthood, finally freeing herself from her own insecurities and expectations. The last chapters, set against the impending demise of both the Stroh family business and the city of Detroit as a whole, still manage to feel uplifting and empowering. What I found most compelling was Stroh's ability to see the opportunity in what others might consider to be her greatest loss. In losing her family fortune, she gains her freedom and herself. I highly recommend this book and eagerly await the sequel ;)

Thought it was very informative. Because we lived through the downfall of this company it was very interesting. My husband was brought over from Schlitz in Milwaukee to work for Stroh. We knew from the beginning that things were not good but because it was a private, family owned company, very little information was leaked out. This book tells of a lot of the problems and it's a very good read.

Being from Detroit but moving away before real problems started developing there, I really enjoyed the book's insights relating both to losing all of the money from a large family business and losing a city at the same time. The book is well written - I read it cover to cover without putting it down for very long. A good read for anyone!

This memoir was well written and an interesting read. I grew up in Detroit and my uncle was an exec at Stroh's. I learned some things that were not apparent back in the day. Frances was honest, frank and likable. I wish her all the best.

Compelling read by a dynasty insider. While written well enough to conger images of the locations and people, what is missing is the emotional content. Where there might have been anger and resentment, instead, we get a description. The take away from the memoir is one business people repeatedly learn the hard way; family should never run the business long term. Failure of business during the third generation's term is almost a rule. The scenes of Detroit's deterioration are frightening but lack the real horror of the devastation to families and individuals who could not flee, who did not have resources to move. While touched on, again, only as a description one might find in a movie trailer. The subplot of substance abuse and the damage it brings, the heartbreak it generates is a common thread regardless of a family's place in industrial history and the one thing that makes this book immensely sad.

Expertly crafted, Stroh unfolds a story with skill. Certainly this is an illustration of "one never knows what goes on behind closed doors". Stroh insightfully reveals the revelations that she has about her family members and uses them as a vehicle to propel the story. For example, she realizes that her brother's troubles are based on him trying so hard to fit in, or that she has been replaced in her father's affections by a classmate as he dotes on his new girlfriend exactly how he used to dote on Stroh. What comes screaming through the story is the detachment that she acknowledges is rampant in her family, but does nothing to change. There never is a confrontation with anyone on the company's board of directors about how they squandered hundreds of millions of dollars in little more than a decade. There is no confrontation with Stroh's father, who behaves like a schoolyard bully with a shopping addiction. There is no adult who defends the siblings that were clearly not favored. Frances, as well as the others, stands by silently. The sections of the book dealing with Stroh's period in London have little reflection on the general theme but instead are the author's attempt to escape and reinvent her identity. At the end of that period of her life, the detachment remains. Although this happens in Detroit, it is not a Detroit story, per se. It is not apparent that the destruction of the Stroh fortune can be blamed on the fortunes of Detroit directly. Perhaps there were many other such families and fortunes that were also managed with such stupidity, laziness, carelessness, and hubris as the Strohs in Detroit. The inability of The Big Three to retool and redesign for the times during the 1970s and 1980s being a case in point, and illustration of similar responses to changing times. Although the waterfront property investments were poorly planned, what killed their fortune, according to Stroh, was lack of the Stroh family fully researching their project. Perhaps the need to still have prominent buildings with the name Stroh on the outside was the motivation. Overall, an excellent read.

Because I am a Detroiter, this book was esp. interesting to me. It was very well written, very well edited and the story line was a pleasure to read. It gave a blow by blow description of the rise and fall of a famous financial empire which went "from shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in a generation". As I completed the last page I felt as though Frances had become a close, personal friend. Her book was worth twice the price !!!

This is a truly outstanding book and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It is extremely well written and very readable. I'm not sure if this book is getting critical acclaim, but it should, both for its substance and its form. The Stroh family's fall from grace is a sad but fascinating story, and the author's very personal telling of it is highly engaging.

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