



MEMOIRS

A handwritten signature of Pierre Trudeau in black ink, written in a cursive style.

Memoirs

Pierre Trudeau

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Pierre Trudeau was prime minister of Canada from 1968 to 1979 and from 1980 to 1984. This is his story, told in his own words.

Take a look through the book. When you do, you will find that this remarkable memoir has many qualities. It is:

PERSONAL

As if he were sitting across the table from you, Pierre Trudeau reminisces about his life in an informal, direct way. He starts with his memories of his family, especially his mother and father, to whom the book is dedicated. There are memorable events from childhood here, such as a visit to complain to the principal on his second day at school. Later there is a lunchroom encounter with a high school bully and then, at the age of fifteen, real tragedy.

“Aroused by the ringing of the telephone, I came out of my room to go downstairs and find out what was happening. But I froze on the landing when I heard the awful words: ‘Your father is dead, Pierre.’”

PHILOSOPHICAL

After an extensive education in Montreal, Boston, London, and Paris, Trudeau set off with a backpack to travel around the world. He tells how he went through one war zone after another, encountering armed bandits and being arrested in wartime Jordan as a Jewish spy. These adventures and further travels through India and war-torn China left with him a deep belief in the rights of the individual and the vital role of government in protecting these rights. He tells how his hatred of narrow nationalism reinforced his stand against requests for special treatment by successive Quebec governments.

POLITICAL

From the day he decided to go to Ottawa as a Liberal MP in 1965, Trudeau was clearly on a fast track. After becoming minister of justice in 1967 and tackling very controversial law reforms, he ran for the leadership and became prime minister in 1968 – the first Canadian leader born in the twentieth century. He talks about his use of “the Liberal machine” and all the electoral fights that followed over the year, providing interesting insights into his contests with national opponents such as Robert Stanfield, David Lewis, Joe Clark (a tougher opponent than the man who deposed him), Ed Broadbent, and Brian Mulroney, about whose virtues he is eloquently silent.

PERSONALITY-FILLED

As a leader whose time in office ran from the fall of Charles de Gaulle to the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, Pierre Trudeau was able to exert his influence to break down the Cold War mentality. He enjoyed good personal rapport with such different leaders as Chou Enlai, Jimmy Carter, Fidel Castro, Helmut Schmidt, and François Mitterand. His relations with Richard Nixon and Margaret Thatcher were less warm, and he was less impressed by Ronald Reagan’s intellect than by the wisdom of the Queen.

PATRIOTIC

Whether they loved him or hated him, Canadians knew that in Pierre Trudeau’s time, the government stood up for Canada. He stood up to the domestic terrorism of the FLQ – and he makes no apologies here for his

tough response to the October Crisis in 1970 – just as he stood up to the provincial premiers (including René Lévesque) who he believed were blocking the patriation of Canada’s constitution ten years later.

PERTINENT

The author’s preface ends with a word to you, the reader. “Whether you were a Liberal Cabinet colleague, a Canadian voter whose support we sought, or a young Canadian whose future we tried to improve, you are a part of this book.”

Memoirs Details

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Liz says

I snatched this one from my mom's bookshelf. I really didn't know anything about PET except my family didn't like him, so I correctly assumed him to a liberal, and that he created PETRO CAN, which my aunt told me (when I was about 10) that it stood for 'Pierre Elliot Trudeau Ripped Off Canada. In the back cover of the book there was a review which I made the mistake of reading. As discussed in the review, the book was written in very simple terms, for such an intellectual, and it didn't go in depth at all about his early years, or his family. I did find the book very interesting as I was quite young when he was Prime Minister, and I studied a bit of his politics in University.

In general I was fascinated with his life. He back packed throughout the world, was extremely well educated, very balanced and a true 'thinker'. I realize of course that this book was simply from his point of view, but I really think he did a lot of good for Canada. I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys (a simply written) an autobiography

Debbie says

Published in 1993, this set of former Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau's memoirs briefly covers the first 49 years of his life including childhood, early world travels and entry into politics, and then concentrates on his time as Prime Minister from 1968-1984.

Anyone who is familiar with Trudeau's time in office knows that humility was never his strong suit. But the man could lead – and here we gain insight into how he did that and how strong self-confidence (alright – arrogance) helped him to do it. You'll want to have at least a basic understanding of the Canadian parliamentary system before reading this. A passing acquaintance with the political issues of the day such as Quebec's push for sovereignty-association, and repatriation of the constitution would enrich your read but is not necessary.

Don't expect in-depth political analysis: although this book weighs in at over two pounds when a similar sized volume might normally be a full half-pound lighter, the font is large, the text spaced, and there are a number of photographs throughout. And don't expect any revelations about his personal life either. When in office, Trudeau scrupulously kept his family separate and apart from his political life. His memoirs' contents mirror that.

Read this if: you loved him, or you hated him (Trudeau seemed to seldom leave anyone on the sidelines with regard to their feelings for him); you want a refresher on Canadian political history of the time (albeit from one point of view); or you want an introduction to one of Canada's most widely-known and best-remembered leaders. 3½ stars

Cathy Ragsdale says

Articulate and quite fascinating, I enjoyed this very much. I have been meaning to explore Canadian history as we are considering a move to Canada, found this to be excellent source of recent history.

I.D. says

Fascinating look behind the scenes of power with intelligence on display that seems to have disappeared in today's buzz word climate. He was a well read and well travelled man who understood the country and issues in a way that gave him perspective and allowed him to fundamentally alter the landscape of Canada. His memoirs shed a light on history and offer a compelling read.

Erin says

Thought I'd brush up on my Canadian history :)

Marni says

I was 16 years old when PET first came into power and this book brought me back to the 'Trudeaumania' days. It also reinforced my admiration of his governing style.

Lucie says

Excellent, but then I'm a big fan of this great Canadian that took on the job of PM, not for the \$ (he had plenty) but for the love of his country. He was intelligent, well spoken and a class act. His memoir sheds light on some of the tough decisions and things he had to do as PM. Enjoyed it tremendously.

Jax Wood says

As Trudeau explains, this auto-biography includes a compilation of his transcripts from a series of interviews with the CBC during his later years. I have always been fascinated by Trudeau's impact on the Canadian public because he was a leader before my time, and this book revealed to me an arrogance and a stubbornness I did not understand before - neither quality of which I think he tried to hide either in life or this book. Yet, I could also see how 'Trudeaumania' could have existed. In the end, Trudeau has become a polarizing figure for Canadians, but his legacy has been captured well in this read. I do recommend it for any Canadian.

Gurinder Singh says

This book turned me into a P. Trudeau admirer. However, it is a bit disheartening to know that it was in fact possible to get a Canadian Charter of Rights without a "notwithstanding clause", had some very well

intentioned people chosen to not to compromise on this issue.

Brayden Raymond says

A review can't do it justice. It's simply amazing. Like a conversation with the man himself. A brilliant book written by a brilliant man, who I wish was still alive today. The world needs more men like him.

Nile says

Really enjoyed it. Provided a really interesting, although probably somewhat biased :), behind the scenes look at one of our greatest Prime Ministers.

Louisa Ielo says

I'm not one for politics, but wanted to widen my variety of reads, and this was at my local Value Village. I learned a lot about my own country's political history, and found that I appreciated P. Trudeau's ideals. I was too young to vote when he was leading the country.

Iris Todd-Lewis says

Very readable...it is like a conversation with an intelligent friend. I admired PET and having read his autobiography, respect him even more. It wasn't an easy 'reign' but I lived it and mostly enjoyed it. Thanks Pierre!

Andrés says

A broad, interesting, but hardly piercing autobiography. Mr Trudeau's self-confidence is evident everywhere and he often quotes other's opinions of him, a somewhat annoying habit. His belief in the individual is well-outlined but I find it at variance with his promotion of cultural pluralism. I am disappointed that his self-confidence prevented a more thorough searching of his heart and experiences, especially in light of his historical significance.

Lorina Stephens says

While I'll admit to greatly admiring Pierre Elliott Trudeau, I did try to read his Memoirs with an unbiased view.

What I found was a man who attempted to view his world without bias, to plot a course of justice, equality

and dynamism that has, in fact, shaped the very foundation of what it means to be Canadian.

His memoir is written in a very casual, conversational tone. You can almost hear him speaking. As such it's also a remarkable insight into the man, who, I believe, was not the arrogant tyrant some extreme right-wing individuals have believed, but rather a man of high intellect and ideals, somewhat self-effacing, who honestly didn't understand when other people could not see the justice and logic of a plan of action.

I believe this book should be a foundation piece in every personal and public library. Highly recommended.

Wendell Hennan says

A thorough account of his childhood and years pursuing a formal education followed by a period pursuing an informal education by touring the world. Also a thorough account of his political life, and done with virtually no criticism of any of his political opponents. While reading his story, it was difficult to remember that he is no longer with us; it seemed that he was telling the story today. Having grown up and spent the first thirty years of my life in Western Canada, I was not a subscriber of Trudeaumania, and I sincerely regret not recognizing what a humanitarian he was and how his vision of Canada which has been passed on to his son Justin, aligns so well with my own. We are a country made beautiful because of our diversity and we must never lose sight of that or stop celebrating that diversity by respecting one another and the rights to which we are all entitled.

Daniel says

The high point of this book arrives on page 122, with a picture of Trudeau having a chat with John Lennon and Yoko Ono. The caption reads:

"I was pleased to receive John Lennon (a member of the Beatles) and his wife, Yoko Ono, in Ottawa in December 1969.

He was kind enough to say afterwards: 'If all politicians were like Mr. Trudeau, there would be world peace.' I must say that 'give peace a chance' has always seemed to me to be sensible advice."

Also included is a full page spread of Trudeau canoeing, some shots of Trudeau dancing, and, on page 267, a shirtless Trudeau appearing to walk on water. He quips: "Had they seen this photograph they might have been even more impressed by my apparent abilities."

By far the best historical slide show ever printed.

Daniel Kukwa says

It's a coffee table version of an autobiography...but it's a coffee table biography written by PIERRE BLOODY TRUDEAU! Does it really need ANY other justification? I didn't think so...

Miguel Hortiguela says

Interesting insights in to the personal experiences that shaped Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau's values and decisions.
