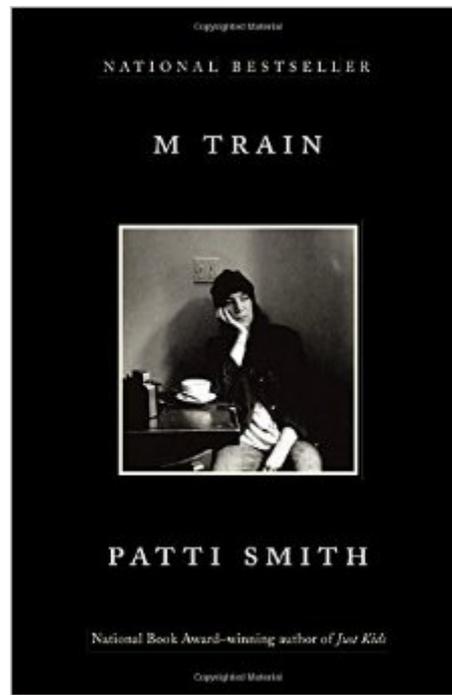


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# M Train



## Synopsis

National Bestseller • From the National Book Award-winning author of *Just Kids*: an unforgettable odyssey of a legendary artist, told through the cafés and haunts she has worked in around the world. It is a book Patti Smith has described as “a roadmap to my life.” *M Train* begins in the tiny Greenwich Village café where Smith goes every morning for black coffee, ruminates on the world as it is and the world as it was, and writes in her notebook. Through prose that shifts fluidly between dreams and reality, past and present, we travel to Frida Kahlo’s Casa Azul in Mexico; to the fertile moon terrain of Iceland; to a ramshackle seaside bungalow in New York’s Far Rockaway that Smith acquires just before Hurricane Sandy hits; to the West 4th Street subway station, filled with the sounds of the Velvet Underground after the death of Lou Reed; and to the graves of Genet, Plath, Rimbaud, and Mishima. Woven throughout are reflections on the writer’s craft and on artistic creation. Here, too, are singular memories of Smith’s life in Michigan and the irremediable loss of her husband, Fred Sonic Smith. *M Train* braiding despair with hope and consolation, illustrated with her signature Polaroids, *M Train* is a meditation on travel, detective shows, literature, and coffee. It is a powerful, deeply moving book by one of the most remarkable multiplatform artists at work today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is poetic in itself. Patti circles her known ground, her home, while venturing to her local café and abroad, to places she has not visited before as well as those known by her. Her way of

writing here is familiar to those who have read her seminal book of herself and Robert Mapplethorpe. Here, she writes much of her former husband, Fred "Sonic" Smith, who has died. Theirs is a story of love, friendship and travel; this entire book is focused on travel, and Patti writes well of it. Here is an example, from the start of the book: "IT'S NOT SO EASY writing about nothing. That's what a cowpoke was saying as I entered the frame of a dream. Vaguely handsome, intensely laconic, he was balancing on a folding chair, leaning backwards, his Stetson brushing the edge of the dun-colored exterior of a lone cafe. I say lone, as there appeared to be nothing else around except an antiquated gas pump and a rusting trough ornamented with a necklace of horseflies slung above the last dregs of its stagnant water. There was no one around, either, but he didn't seem to mind; he just pulled the brim of his hat over his eyes and kept on talking. It was the same kind of Silverbelly Open Road model that Lyndon Johnson used to wear.

Patti Smith's newest memoir engages the reader from the first page. Her breathtakingly beautiful prose about her life, her books, her travels, her relationships, and her innermost thoughts transports you to places you wish you'd shared with her. It's a rare book that I know I will begin reading again and again as soon as I finish the last word. Like JUST KIDS and "Horses," she captivates her audience. With her rich life and zest for intellectual searches and connections, I wish she were a personal friend. For a few hours, sharing her words in print, she can be. Don't miss her latest gift to us!

I almost stopped halfway through. A good friend encouraged me to continue. "It gets better," she said. I continued because of that and because I have loved and respected Patti Smith's music and poetry since I was in my mid-teens. I was a charter member of her fan club in the mid-'70s. I also feel it's my responsibility as a committed reader to finish a book that's been written with grit and authenticity. It got a little better, but I continued to feel like I didn't really know where she was or who she was talking about a lot of the time. There were a number of paragraphs I had to read over and over again to track where we were: the equivalent of talking to someone who's speaking almost inaudibly or with a thick, unusual accent. I felt like I was squinting my eyes and craning my neck to track her conversation. There's no doubt of her being a brilliant wordsmith and poet, and that she has shared her grief in a poetic and deep way. At the end of the story, I was disappointed that after all the poignant mentions about her husband Fred and after I, the reader, proving my interest and investment by hanging in there till the end of the book she doesn't share with us what happened. I felt let down. To assuage my disappointment, I googled Fred Smith and learned this (which helped

me to have completion):"In 1976, firebrand rock poetess Patti Smith visited Detroit while touring behind her album *Radio Ethiopia*, and was introduced to Fred Sonic Smith at a party held at Lafayette Coney Island, one of the city's most celebrated hot dog stands. While Fred Smith was married at the time, he and Patti immediately hit it off, and before long a low-key romance blossomed between them. By 1978, Fred was once again single, and he and Patti were free to go public with their relationship. In 1980, Fred and Patti were married; Sonic's *Rendezvous Band* had recently broken up, and after a calamitous European tour following the release of her album, *Wave*, Patti opted to retire from touring. The couple moved to St. Clair Shores, a suburb of Detroit, and quietly settled down to raise a son and a daughter away from the media spotlight and the rigors of a musician's life. Both Patti and Fred continued to write music together, and in 1986, Patti came out of retirement to record the album *Dream of Life*. Fred wrote much of the material in collaboration with Patti, played guitar on the album, and helped to produce the sessions. In a 1996 interview, Patti said, "Dream of Life was really more Fred's record -- it was all Fred's music, Fred's philosophy." Though it featured the anthemic "People Have the Power," a song that would become a highlight of Patti's live shows, *Dream of Life* failed to find an audience, despite strong reviews. Sadly, it would prove to be one of Fred's last major projects. In the late '80s, his health went into decline, and on November 9, 1994, Fred Sonic Smith died of heart failure in a Detroit hospital -- ironically, the same malady that took the life of MC5 vocalist Rob Tyner two years earlier."

[<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/fred-sonic-smith-mn0000176087>]Ultimately, I felt that while Patti has shared deep, intrapsychic treasure with us, she isn't intimate or relational with us, her readers. There was depth, and there was great, though vague, beauty. A lot of literary name-dropping, and her deepest relationships in the story appear to be with the dead or with inanimate objects (a coat, stones, coffee). I'll be pondering this one for a while. All of that said, Patti Smith is a deep, unique artist in a soul-less age. For that, I am deeply grateful.

Oh Patti, so disappointed in this book. I've been a fan of hers since the 1970's. I loved "Just Kids" and have other books by her from over the years. I can't agree with the glowing reviews of others. I feel like we read different books. What is offered is not so much a memoir of life with Fred which is how it was described, but the musings of the past (Fred a passing comment here and there), drinking coffee, life as a housewife, obscure references (at least to me), Hurricane Sandy and more coffee. SO much more coffee. Wanted to put it down out of boredom but plowed through hoping it would pick up, which it did 3/4 of the way through. Barely.

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