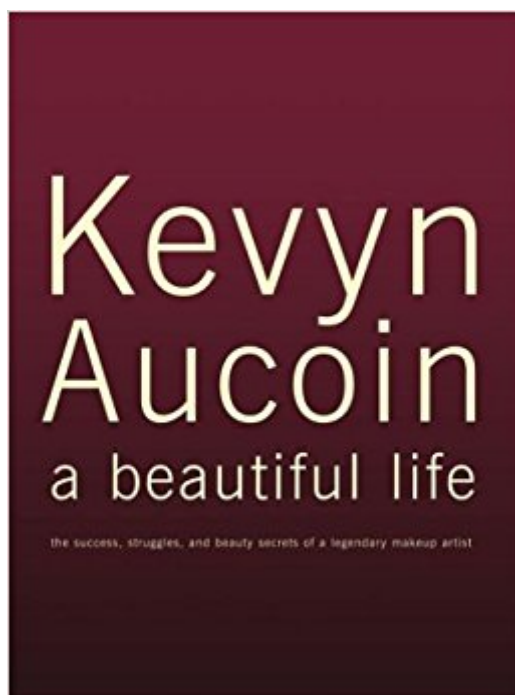


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Kevyn Aucoin: A Beautiful Life



Synopsis

Kevyn Aucoin led the kind of glamorous life that can only be imagined. He tended to the faces of every A-list star and did the makeup for countless music videos, magazine shoots and fashion shows. However, few would have predicted his incredible rise given the heartwrenching difficulties of his childhood. But at a young age, he discovered his talent for applying makeup and dreamed of leaving his small Southern town to make it in the fashion world of New York. He did just that and within eight months he was working for Vogue magazine. During his amazing career, Kevyn kept detailed diaries of every assignment he received and filled each entry with polaroids, names and places. A BEAUTIFUL LIFE showcases the most exciting of these pages and brings the behind-the-scenes world of fashion, celebrity and music to life for the reader. And of course it contains a 'greatest hits' of Kevyn's favourite celebrity makeup tips, some revealed for the first time ever. Kevyn was so beloved by his fans and his famous friends because of the message behind his makeup: self-respect and tolerance. For Kevyn, leading A BEAUTIFUL LIFE was first and foremost about inner beauty and this book builds on that legacy.

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Customer Reviews

"Kevyn helped me to see that it's okay to open up and express yourself and that doing so will take you to new places."

Chapter One: 1962-1977. The Foundation Years. "I understood early that beauty was power." "I made a crash landing here on earth on February 14, 1962, in the Shreveport Catholic Charities

Home for un-wed mothers. The infamous Bonnie and Clyde lost their lives just miles from where I was born. Like outlaws ourselves, my birth mother and I were on the run from the day she found out I was part of her." As an adult, Kevyn Aucoin led the kind of glamorous, fast-paced life that can only be imagined. He tended to the face of every A-list star, penned bestselling books, met princesses and presidents, and commanded thousands of dollars for a single day's work. Few could have predicted this incredible rise given his heart-wrenching childhood. The complications began well before Kevyn was born. His mother, Nelda Mae Sweat, was a scared, pregnant sixteen-year-old with strict Baptist parents. His father, a handsome football player named Jerry Burch, didn't believe that the baby was his. When Nelda's parents discovered her condition, they shipped her off to St. Ann's, a home for unwed mothers in Shreveport, Louisiana, where she lived for three months. Nelda went into labor on Valentine's Day and almost died during the delivery when her blood pressure dropped precipitously. Her parents forbade her to see the baby boy, but she managed to slip into the nursery each night and rock him to sleep. She named him Scott Kevin. Right before she was discharged, Nelda made one last secret visit to the nursery. She clipped off the baby's ID bracelet and returned home, heartbroken about the child she was forced to leave behind. She had no idea if she would ever see him again. Across the state in a town called Lafayette, Isidore Aucoin, Jr., a telephone company manager, and his wife, Thelma, had filed an adoption request with the Catholic Charities and were put on a waiting list. The couple, childless after a decade of marriage, desperately wanted a baby. A month later, while Thelma was washing dishes in their modest home, the phone rang. A newborn was available. The Aucoins named him Kevin James. (Almost twenty years later, Kevyn would change the spelling of his first name.) Thelma doted on her baby, and he grew into a plump, jowly toddler. "When he was two, he was so fat his legs would rub together until they were raw," recalls his aunt Laura Bourgeois. "The pediatrician made Thelma put him on a diet, and Kevyn cried and cried." By this time, Kevyn had a baby brother named Keith, who also came from St. Ann's. Over the next eight years, two adopted girls rounded out the family -- Carla, gregarious and feminine, and Kim, tomboyish and introspective. The girls shared one bedroom and the boys another in the red brick house that Isidore had built years earlier in the middle-class neighborhood. The Aucoins had a carport, a big backyard, and one bathroom. The monthly mortgage payment was \$74.66. Like other little boys, Kevyn liked to climb trees and run around barefoot. But he also loved to dance, draw, and listen to songs (such as "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head") over and over. "I was a regular little boy who also enjoyed things that girls did," Kevyn told the producers of *Oliver Button Is a Star*, a documentary based on the 1979 children's book *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*. "I was a tomboy and a sissy boy." Kevyn wore bright green patent-leather

loafers on his first day of school and regularly rearranged the living-room furniture -- both with his mother's approval. "She was very supportive of me being who I was and understood my femininity," said Kevyn. "That gave me the impetus to be who I am today." By the age of six, Kevyn realized he was different from the other kids, but, he said, "I didn't know what gay was. There was no such thing when I was growing up. I knew I had crushes on boys, but I didn't think there was anything wrong with that until I started to hear about it from the other kids in school." Even the local Catholic priest ranted about evil homosexuals during his sermon every Sunday. Kevyn thought he was destined to become a rapist or a child molester. He first considered suicide at the age of eight. He tried to fit in, but it was tough in a town like Lafayette. Located in the heart of Cajun country, it wasn't a progressive or tolerant place by any stretch. At its best, it was a tight-knit society that embodied the *joie de vivre* of the Cajuns. At its worst, it was a population of small-minded, insular folks, wary of anything or anybody different. At the age of eleven, Kevyn tried to bury his feelings about boys and found a girlfriend named Karen. They wrote love letters back and forth and talked about getting engaged. "If my family ever moved out of this city, I'd run away and come back to you," wrote Karen on her baby-blue notebook paper. Kevyn played baseball to please his father, who coached Kevyn's and Keith's teams. He was a Boy Scout, but the crushing separation anxiety he suffered when apart from his family made the required camping trips an impossibility. He was an accomplished saxophonist with the school band until his instrument was stolen. The Aucoins could not afford a new one, so his music career came to a halt. Gangly, effeminate, and artistic, Kevyn became a target for his classmates. The physical and verbal abuse began around the fifth grade. "We'd be at the bus stop, and they would use words like faggot and queer," says his brother, Keith, who today is a welder and a father of five. "I didn't know what these words meant, but I knew they hurt him. They would spit on him, slap him across the head, and punch him. I didn't understand what was going on, but Kevyn was crying, and I needed to do something. I'd jump on somebody's back and get my ass beat, and Kevyn got beat, and then we'd walk home." Isidore Aucoin remembers the day Keith tried to rip through a screen door to get at some boys who had been taunting Kevyn. Many of the teachers in Kevyn's elementary school turned blind eyes to the torture or even participated in it. One male teacher "made a habit of bringing me in front of the class, taking my pants down, and spanking me, which was sexual abuse, basically," Kevyn said. "It's something that I look back on and just cringe. It was a horrible, horrible experience." To add to the humiliation, Kevyn often was summoned to a speech therapy class -- via a schoolwide intercom announcement -- where a young female teacher tried to eradicate his lisp. Things at home were as stormy as Louisiana's subtropical weather. "Fights with my father were really quite brutal," said Kevyn. "I would

not live his vision. I would not become who he wanted me to be. Everything I did was criticized. I would spend three months drawing something and show him, and he would look up from his paper and just look back down. I got no approval from him for anything I did that was creative." On top of all this, his parents were alcoholics. Looking back, Isidore says he didn't realize how his drinking or his behavior affected his son. "Kevyn seemed to think I was an alcoholic, and I guess I was," he says, sitting at the kitchen table in the family home. "I'm not going to try to deny that. I did drink, and I drank almost every day. Thelma and I both drank. I didn't go to bars. Nothing like that. But I did drink at home. I don't think it affected my relationship with the kids. I might have thought I was doing all right, and maybe I wasn't." Despite Thelma's drinking, Kevyn adored her, as she was more understanding of her oldest child than her husband was. "If they had both been unsupportive, I'd be in a mental ward right now -- or maybe not even here," Kevyn once said. Thelma's biggest issue regarding his apparent homosexuality was safety, and she thought she could scare him into changing his sexual orientation for his own well-being. Whenever the local newspaper sensationalized a gay-related beating or murder, Thelma clipped it out and left it for Kevyn to see. Kevyn managed to find several escapes from the turmoil. At the age of eleven, he began making up his little sister Carla, inspired by the glossy fantasy world featured in his bible, *Vogue*. (Kevyn couldn't afford to buy fashion magazines, so he flipped through them at the local stores, behavior that only added to his reputation as a strange little boy.) He memorized the work of photographer Francesco Scavullo and makeup artist Way Bandy and transformed his barely six-year-old sister into a disco diva, Brooke Shields, or supermodel Rene Russo using a handful of props, some fabric, and a few cosmetics borrowed from Thelma's very limited supply. When Kevyn finished with the hair, makeup, and wardrobe, he tacked a rug or a sheet to the wall, positioned Carla in front of it, and took a Polaroid. The pictures and poses were amazingly mature for two kids at play. Kevyn's other passion during his adolescence was drawing. "I was absolutely lost in love and life when I did my drawings," he said. "Time stood still." While Carla was his makeup muse, Barbra Streisand was his subject of choice for painting and sketching. Kevyn labored over dozens of portraits of her that he copied from Streisand's movie posters, album covers, and promotional pictures. By the time his first year of high school rolled around, his obsession with Streisand was full blown. He kept scrapbooks filled with her press clippings, sent her cards on her birthday, and played her music every chance he got. (Isidore remembers hearing "The Way We Were" more than a hundred times.) He owned every album she released, even though he could barely afford them. "Records were expensive," says Keith, who preferred Led Zeppelin and AC/DC to his brother's beloved songbird. "We had to wash the car and mow the grass, rake everything, and then hustle some money around

picking up cans and turning in bottles to get things like that." Kevyn was an outsider among his fellow students, but he never hid what made him different. "There was absolutely no mistaking in most people's minds that he was gay," says Glenn Neely, Kevyn's first serious boyfriend. "That did not go over well." This didn't stop Kevyn from convincing the editors of the Lafayette High School newspaper, the Parlez-Vous, to write a story about his Streisand fanaticism. The four photographs that accompanied the article were taken on Kevyn's side of his wood-paneled bedroom, which was a shrine to Barbra. "Because of Kevyn's great interest and respect for Streisand, he has started a small but growing fan club," wrote student Lisa Farnsworth in the story. "After graduation he plans to go to California for his senior trip in order to meet her. (Let's wish him luck!)" The article caught the attention of Glenn, a handsome, blond senior from a well-off family. "I opened the paper, and there was a picture of Kevyn and all the pictures of Barbra all over his wall. He just seemed intriguing to me, and he looked really cute, so I wanted to meet him. I don't know why. I just knew there was something about him." Glenn, who says he didn't realize he was gay at the time, was on the lookout for Kevyn that day, but he failed to find him. A few weeks later, while Glenn was hanging out at his girlfriend's house, the doorbell rang. It was Kevyn. Unbeknownst to Glenn, Kevyn and his girlfriend had become pals. "So he walks in, and I'm freaking," says Glenn. "He sits down and starts talking to us and he was really funny, even back then. Within like fifteen, twenty minutes, we decided to walk outside and sit on my car. We left my girlfriend inside. We had a tape deck, and we played music and talked for an hour. We hit it off right away." Glenn called Kevyn soon after that night and asked for his help finding a tuxedo for the prom. Summer vacation rolled around, and they saw each other almost every day for the entire break. "I don't think we left each other's side for more than a few hours at a time," Glenn says. For weeks, it was just an intense friendship. Glenn stayed over at the Aucoins', or Kevyn stayed at Glenn's, which was across town in a wealthy part of Lafayette. One late night at the Neelys', the relationship moved to a new level. "I woke up because Kevyn's arm had fallen over on me. I sort of froze. I didn't know if I should do anything or pretend it wasn't there," says Glenn. "Eventually I put my arm around him. Within a few days, we moved upstairs and started sleeping in the same bed." Around this time, Kevyn officially came out to his mother. Thelma had been raised Catholic and was taught that homosexuality was wrong, but she loved her son and handled his announcement the best she could. "It took us a long time to accept, not just tolerate, but really accept Kevyn being gay," she wrote years later. Thelma eventually left the Catholic church. The first person Kevyn ever came out to was his cousin, Jay Theall, who was also gay and lived across the state in Lake Charles. Jay was a frequent and intense pen pal who struggled with his emotions and looked to Kevyn for support and reassurance. On the lighter side,

they bonded over their fascination with celebrity. Jay's letters in those pre-e-mail days were filled with references to movies, award shows, Top 40 countdowns, and a whole cast of '70s stars, led by their absolute favorite, Barbra Streisand. "Did you see the American Music Awards? Linda Ronstadt beat Streisand! I wanted to be sick. I couldn't believe it," wrote Jay in one of the dozens of letters Kevyn saved from his cousin. With the summer coming to a close and school a few weeks away, sixteen-year-old Kevyn thought he and Glenn should live on their own. Neither of them had a job, and their only money was a \$250 benefit check that Glenn received each month because his father had died in a plane crash when he was a baby. All they could afford was a dingy one-bedroom apartment a few miles away from the Aucoins' that rented for \$200. They had little money left over each month, so they relied on their parents for food and other basics. Flush with their newfound independence, they decided to visit their first gay bar, a local joint called Southern Comfort. "We had heard these horror stories about gay bars and that it was this big orgy, so we were petrified to go in," says Glenn. The two waited outside for what seemed like hours, but the street out front wasn't a safe place to be. Every now and then, some locals drove by and threw bottles at the entrance. "It wasn't a bad part of town -- it was just a bad thing to be gay," notes Glenn. It was the height of the disco era, so when the two finally worked up the courage to run inside, they found a dance party under way. Donna Summer's big hit "MacArthur Park" was on the sound system, and Kevyn and Glenn were surprised to see men dancing together. Later that night, they met their first drag queen: Ms. Pool. These men made up as women mesmerized Kevyn. It was a pivotal moment, as he was witnessing firsthand the transforming power of makeup. If you wanted to be someone or something else, all it took was the right products. You could literally change your life -- or someone else's -- with lipstick. After his encounter with Ms. Pool, Kevyn started inviting drag queens over to his apartment to do their makeup. Soon enough, all of them wanted this sixteen-year-old prodigy to paint their faces. That September, reality beckoned. Kevyn had to start his junior year of high school and Glenn his freshman year at the local college. The taunting and abuse that began in grammar school had yet to end for Kevyn. "From the day I started high school, I was beaten up daily," he said. "I spent every recess hiding in an empty storage room." Kevyn finally dropped out after some students tried to run him over with a pickup truck. "I quit because my life was threatened, literally." A month later, Glenn dropped out of college. As he was no longer a student, this meant the end of his government checks. The two teenagers now were broke, but they were in love and on their own for the first time in their lives. In 1994, Kevyn would tell The Advocate that meeting Glenn had saved his life. Copyright © 2003 by Aucoin, Inc.

Got these for my sister, she loves them

Kevyn was one of the greatest makeup artists in the world and this book affectionately talks about his life and skills.

Priceless information.

Great book. Kevyn Aucoin was truly helpful!!! Thanks Kevyn.

A miracle worker, artist, and funny man holds your hand and teaches you to be beautiful. This book will make your appearance flawless and better your heart while building self confidence.

From the first moment I saw Kevyn's first book, "The Art of Makeup", I was inspired and moved by his talent and passion for his craft. I remember staring at the huge pages of his first book and it was then that my creative juices started flowing and haven't stopped since. It was my older brother who had always supported my interest and passion for makeup and makeup artistry, and it was he who gave me 2 of 3 of Kevyn's books. All of them only making me crave more of him and wanting to aspire even more. My brother saw that it was the Beauty & Health section I ran to in bookstores to sit in the aisle and flip thru Kevyn's books. With the sad passing of Kevyn, I believe that the fashion world lost such an immense talent and impressionable soul. I didn't have to know Kevyn personally to feel that he was a giving and sweet individual, his books and artwork showed me more. His closest friends share countless tales and how he had touched them in so many ways. This book leaves us with his legacy of beauty, talent, art, love, his activism on numerous issues, and most importantly his life. It is a wonderful biography filled with photographs of celebrities he had befriended and worked with. I most definitely recommend getting this book for those of you that were touched and inspired by him and his work...IT and Kevyn truly were a masterpiece. Thanks Kerry Diamond for leaving us with a greater picture of a beloved soul.

KEVYN AUCOIN: A BEAUTIFUL LIFE is a well-written, candid look at the life and beauty techniques of one of the best makeup artists in the world. Included is a biography of Kevyn and many, many personal and private pictures on just about every page. You'll find out about Kevyn's life from his childhood days to his stardom as a makeup artist, all the way to his death. Also included are many personal anecdotes and stories from people who have respected Kevyn such as Tina

Turner and Britney Spears. After the biography comes an entire section showing you Kevyn's makeup techniques, tips, and secrets, along with many beautiful, full-color photographs that illustrate every step and the finished product. You'll get advice on everything from eyes to lips! Overall, this book is a wonderful tribute and the perfect gift for anyone who has appreciated Kevyn's work.

Anyone seriously interested in the art of makeup must be familiar with the name Kevyn Aucoin. In the era of the supermodel, he was the super makeup artist. Aucoin was not only an exceptional artist, but an exceptional person. I could rave on and on about my late teens and early twenties, when I went through a period of self hatred because of the way I perceived myself. Kevyn's books encouraged readers to be adventurous in their exploration of self-image, teaching good techniques and smart tricks. It may sound trite, but I honestly believe those books did a lot for my self-esteem as well as my makeup skills. Even if you don't own his other books, this one is worth having for sure.

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