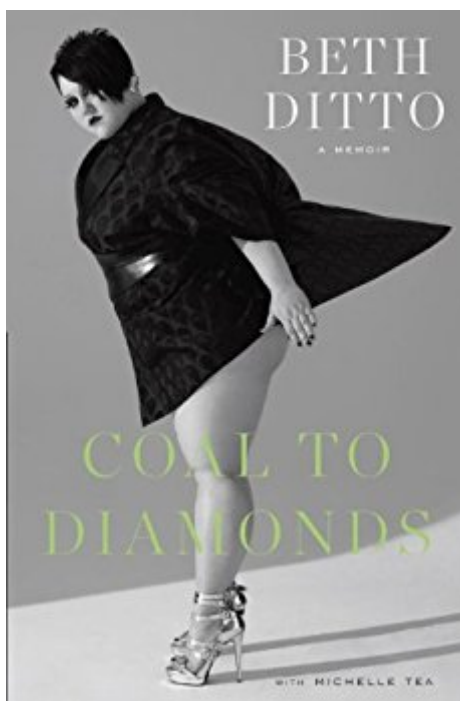


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# Coal To Diamonds: A Memoir



## Synopsis

A raw and surprisingly beautiful coming-of-age memoir, *Coal to Diamonds* tells the story of Mary Beth Ditto, a girl from rural Arkansas who found her voice. Born and raised in Judsonia, Arkansas—a place where indoor plumbing was a luxury, squirrel was a meal, and sex ed was taught during senior year in high school (long after many girls had gotten pregnant and dropped out) Beth Ditto stood out. Beth was a fat, pro-choice, sexually confused choir nerd with a great voice, an eighties perm, and a Kool Aid dye job. Her single mother worked overtime, which meant Beth and her five siblings were often left to fend for themselves. Beth spent much of her childhood as a transient, shuttling between relatives, caring for a sickly, volatile aunt she nonetheless loved, looking after sisters, brothers, and cousins, and trying to steer clear of her mother's bad boyfriends. Her punk education began in high school under the tutelage of a group of teens—her second family—who embraced their outsider status and introduced her to safety-pinned clothing, mail-order tapes, queer and fat-positive zines, and any shred of counterculture they could smuggle into Arkansas. With their help, Beth survived high school, a tragic family scandal, and a mental breakdown, and then she got the hell out of Judsonia. She decamped to Olympia, Washington, a late-1990s paradise for Riot Grrrls and punks, and began to cultivate her glamorous, queer, fat, femme image. On a whim—with longtime friends Nathan, a guitarist and musical savant in a polyester suit, and Kathy, a quiet intellectual turned drummer—she formed the band Gossip. She gave up trying to remake her singing voice into the ethereal wisp she thought it should be and instead embraced its full, soulful potential. Gossip gave her that chance, and the raw power of her voice won her and Gossip the attention they deserved. Marked with the frankness, humor, and defiance that have made her an international icon, *Coal to Diamonds*'s unapologetic, startlingly direct, and poetic memoir is a hypnotic and inspiring account of a woman coming into her own. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was lucky enough to get to know Beth Ditto in 1999-2000 in Olympia when I was performing as a drag king and we had some mutual friends. Although it's been several years since I've seen her reading this book is what I remember about having a conversation with her - she tells it like it is and doesn't flinch or hold back the hard parts. I've always seen Beth as loud, tough, punk, someone who says "this is who I am and I am not changing for you" and this book shows where that spirit comes from, but also the vulnerability of what being a misfit in a small town feels like and the overwhelming desire to break cycles of abuse and poverty and find a place where you can shine for what you are. Coal to Diamonds is the life story (so far) of someone who has thrived and made a place for herself in this world when there were so many circumstances stacked against her doing so. She is a fierce protector of those she loves, a fighter, a feminist, and a voice for a generation of misfits, queers, punks, and especially femmes who will not be silenced or made to feel ashamed for who they are. Read this book and go out and change the world.

Beth Ditto is a feminist, lesbian, overweight advocate of body image acceptance, prospective style and fashion guru, but best known as the lead singer of the indie rock band, Gossip. Her memoir begins with stories of her unique, fractured childhood in rural Arkansas, where she exiled herself from her own home to live with an eccentric aunt and her incest-prone son, until her music became her ticket out to the Pacific Northwest. It was there that she formed the band Gossip, refined their post-punk unique sound, and honed her aggressive stage presence to become an international star of that genre. The first part of the book includes some rather shocking stories of her life through her teens, where she was a frequent target of abuse and bullying, living in a deeply conservative backwoods, where women and other races were often treated as inferior citizens. It is remarkable how she managed to not just survive in that environment, but actually to use it to take the strength

she needed to turn her life around and be a success. Though I am not a fan of her type of music, her story is enough to make me a fan of hers. Four stars out of five.- Bob Lind, Echo Magazine

I really enjoyed reading Beth's memoirs. I originally purchased it because I'm a huge fan of the Gossip and I wanted to know more about their story, how they came about becoming who they were. However, I got insight into Beth's world growing up and felt an attachment to her that I'd never felt. Her life story is of survival, of dealing with so many different emotional issues and yet being able to push through them and become successful. Many times I've asked myself where they get the inspiration for their songs which I relate to greatly and in this book I found a lot of the answers. I saw an interview of Hannah once and she said "Beth doesn't want to be anyone's role model." But Beth became exactly that in my view by penning this book.

My introduction to Beth Ditto began on the internet. I've read articles about her being fat-positive and feminist. I've read articles about her creating a clothing line for fat girls. I've seen plenty of pictures of her. I had never, before today, heard any of her music. Yes, I knew she was in a band, but I never thought about checking them out. Of course, that was the first thing I did whenever I finished this book. Mainly, though, I requested to read *Coal to Diamonds* because I was interested in hearing more about Ditto's fat-positive views. Perhaps, reading the book would help me to embrace myself a little more. I really enjoyed the conversational style of the memoir. It gave me the feeling that I was meeting Beth for the first time and she was giving me insight into her life by sharing these stories that helped shape her into the person she is today. She speaks very openly about her life, the good and the bad, and I found that to be really refreshing. I was a little disappointed that the book wasn't longer. Things could have been a little more fleshed out than they actually were. The story doesn't follow a linear pattern at all, but I guess that fits in with the more conversational style of the book. Overall, those two things didn't make enough of a negative impact. I enjoyed *Coal to Diamonds: A Memoir*. And after checking out Gossip's music, I really enjoyed it as well. I would recommend checking them both out.\* This book was received from Netgalley for review. \*

I first saw Beth Ditto on Andy Cohen's *What What Happens Live* on Bravo. I found her to be an entertaining, no holds barred woman. I immediately purchased *A Joyful Noise* CD. It is a great CD. I then purchased *Music for Men*. Again, a great CD. Both CD's are exceptional from start to finish. After having experienced two terrific purchases, I expected her memoir *Coal to Diamonds* to be of the

same quality. Unfortunately, it is not. The memoir grabs you from page 1 and won't let you go; however, when it does let you go toward the end of the book, it does it too quickly. The unfortunate note on this memoir is that it appears after about 140 pages, Ms. Ditto was like "okay, let's get this thing over with." and the book ends too abruptly. She mentions that Gossip finished their last album, but fails to mention the name of it. There is no mention of her upcoming nuptials. I was sadly disappointed. Ditto should have taken the time to complete the memoir and leave the reader waiting for part II of her life. I would have been one to immediately snatch up Part II. Now I'm not so sure.

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