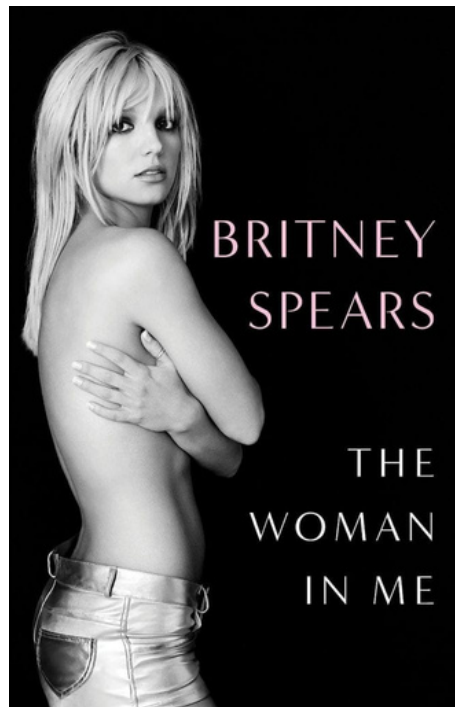


DECEMBER 12, 2024 MIKAYLA STOCK

BRITNEY SPEARS MAKES HER VOICE HEARD

*After thirteen years under the dark conservatorship of her estranged father, the singer, dancer, and pop icon is ready to reclaim her womanhood in a riveting after-the-storm memoir, *The Woman in Me*.*



The cover features an image of Britney from 2001—seven years prior to the start of her conservatorship. Photo Credit: Simon & Schuster

THE WOMAN IN ME, by Britney Spears

What does a snake have in common with a conservator? Both know how to restrict, restrain, and suppress by tightening their grip.

The year was 2001. The event was the MTV Video Music Awards. The performer was none other than the Princess of Pop herself, Ms. Britney Jean Spears. “I’m a Slave 4 U,” a song off of Spears’ latest album, *Britney*, exited her lips and bounced off the venue’s walls. The most noteworthy living being to join her on stage for the number wasn’t one of her backup dancers, despite their immense talent. The star co-performer was significantly more flexible and dynamic than any lousy human could ever be. That’s because he wasn’t actually a human in the slightest, but a seven-foot long albino

Burmese python named Banana. Some would say that his feature made the performance one of the famed singer and dancer's most legendary gigs to date.



Spears and Banana performing at the 2001 VMAs.

Photo Credit: Kevin Kane/Getty Images

Draped around Spears' shoulders as if snake and artist were the best of friends, Banana made her appear fearless: calm, cool, collected, and in complete control of the reptile she carried around while simultaneously singing and dancing to an audience of millions. The reality of the situation on stage was far less relaxed than the supposedly seamless performance flashing across viewers' TV screens. "I felt if I looked up and caught his eye, he would kill me. What nobody knows is that as I was singing, Banana brought his head right around to my face, right up to me, and started hissing at me," Britney recalls in her book.

Spears' 2023 memoir *The Woman in Me* features the Banana story along with many others. Over the course of 275 pages, she divulges the entirety of her life and career up until the book's release. It reads as an honest tell-all of betrayal, isolation, trust, misogyny, abuse, a golden career, familial pains, vulnerability, spirituality, motherhood, fame, control, creativity, music, hard work, autonomy, love, heartbreak, self discovery, healing and so much more. Readers get an unrefined, emotion-inducing glimpse into her journey—it's an experience that pulls you in up until the very end.

Spears is credited as the book's author, but she does express her thanks for a few collaborators during her acknowledgements. Sources say that three individuals assisted her throughout the process: non-fiction writer Ada Calhoun, *Time* magazine editor Sam Lansky, and ghostwriter Luke Dempsey. Dempsey has had previous experience with writing about musicians' lives—he worked with Priscilla and Lisa Marie Presley for their book *Elvis by the Presleys*. Although Spears and her collaborators' writing style appears as simple, unrefined, and conversational, the story they share releases an energy that stays with you long after putting the memoir down.

One cannot discuss the significance of *The Woman in Me* without defining just how *big* an impact Spears has had on the world. There are no better words to describe her than completely and utterly iconic. She represents sterling stardom, boasting a discography of nine perfectly executed studio albums featuring beloved tunes such as "...Baby One More Time," "Womanizer," "Toxic," and "Oops!...I Did It Again." Spears has forever left her mark on music—known for reviving teen pop in the 1990s, she rightfully earned the Princess title. Few can—and will ever be able to—do the state of pop as good as she has throughout her career. But at what cost?

Britney Spears - ...Baby One More Time (Official Video)



Despite being written under the name of a member of the music industry, Spears' book goes far beyond music itself. From detailing her childhood in Kentwood, Louisiana, to revealing the early days of her career starring on *The Mickey Mouse Club*, to covering her relationship with Justin Timberlake, to highlighting her work as an artist, to detailing her marriage with Kevin Federline, to describing her experience with motherhood, a custody battle, postpartum depression, and miscarriage, to unveiling her battles with the paparazzi, to opening up about the darkest days of her conservatorship, Britney makes space for it all. Woven throughout every page is an unparalleled vulnerability

and an unusually deep understanding of herself and the people around her. When reading, you can't help but feel like you're sitting with her, hearing the words pour out of her soul right before your eyes.

Spears' lighter tone in earlier chapters makes way for a shift around the point of her break-up with Justin Timberlake. Timberlake comes up regularly throughout the book, often to serve as a reference point for the leeway that men in Hollywood are granted to be wild and free while maintaining complete control of their careers. Britney's every move during her life has been under a microscope. Her words on the misogyny that plagues the entertainment industry hold undeniable power. "The industry—really the whole world—is set up more for men. Especially if you're 'nice,' like me, you can be completely destroyed," she shares. Women everywhere will deeply resonate with her perspective as I have.

As one may expect, much of Spears' memoir focuses on the thirteen-year conservatorship that her family—who long profited off of her success—placed her under. At this point in the story, the tone goes black until the end. Her father, who had been appointed as her conservator, sat her down and shared chilling words with the singer at the start of it all: "'I just want you to know,' he said, 'I call the shots. I'm Britney Spears now.'" She lost all control over every aspect of her life: where she lived, whether she could drive, what she ate, what activities she could do each day, and beyond. When retelling the details of the conservatorship, Spears noted that "the woman in me was pushed down for a long time. It was death to my creativity as an artist." Once she found the tools to escape from her hellish reality, her light slowly began to return, but the path to healing stretches far beyond the horizon.

Some may question whether Spears' account of her life is fully honest and believable. Her story reads much like someone's personal diary. She had no intention to write a memoir for her own selfish gains. If anything, her truth illuminates from every single page. After so many years of being silenced by the people who should have lifted her up and encouraged her to grow independently, *The Woman in Me* became her chance to take back control of the narrative.



*Spears on the red carpet at the 2016 Billboard Music Awards. Photo
Credit: Lester Cohen/Getty Images*

Spears' aspirations for *The Woman in Me* gain clarity towards the book's end. "It took a long time and a lot of work for me to feel ready to tell my story. I hope it inspires people on some level and can touch hearts. Since I've been free, I've had to construct a whole different identity," she reveals. Here is a woman who has lived through more in her first forty years than most will ever undergo in their lifetime. Sharing her experience with the world kickstarts the journey of humanizing herself and stepping into her power after being under someone else's control. How *healing* it must be to get all the pain within her heart outside of herself and onto paper. Writing becomes an act of solace, and her retelling exists as much for her as for the reader.

What meaning results from a celebrity recounting the details of their life? Why do we care to receive intimate insights into the happenings of unfathomably wealthy, often out-of-touch people who we have no personal relationship with? The worth is no different than if your closest friend shared their own life story with you. Despite the fact that famous musicians, actors, artists, and so forth have such different lived experiences, tragedies, and successes than the average person may, there is still much to be learned from others when we start viewing ourselves as a collective humanity. Shedding light on your deepest wounds in hopes that others can learn from them or resonate with them speaks volumes. By sharing her words in an accessible manner, Spears invites anyone who picks up *The Woman in Me* to connect with her on that deep level. After so many years of isolation, comfort comes from knowing that your own introspection moves and empowers others.

Anyone who may question the silly videos that Spears shares to platforms like Instagram, or who wishes to pick her life apart now that she exists free from her

conservatorship, should take the time to read her memoir. She says it best: "Freedom means that I get to be as beautifully imperfect as everyone else. And freedom means the ability, and the right, to search for joy, in my own way, on my own terms. It's been a while since I felt truly present in my own life, in my own power, in my womanhood. But I'm here now."

Now, back to what a snake has in common with a conservator. Much like Banana kept Spears in a state of fear, taunting her during her 2001 VMAs performance, Spears' conservator—her own father—kept her under constant surveillance, threatening to strike anytime she looked up or attempted to break free from his control. He would only wrap himself tighter around her, and for many years, no handler could help.

Eventually, a handler stepped up. The snake's grip loosened, the weight of its body forever lifted from Spears' shoulders. With the help of fans who rallied to bring attention to her situation, her future and the path to it—in whatever form that path must take—now belongs to her.

Posted in Books, Uncategorized