

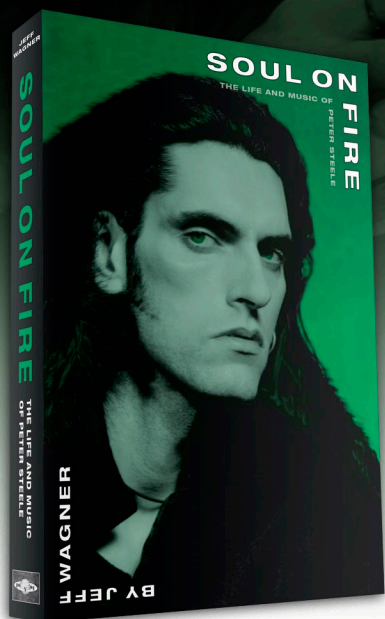
TOO LATE FOR APOLOGIES (PROLOGUE), AN EXCERPT FROM:

SOUL ON

THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF

PETER STEELE
FIRE

BY JEFF
WAGNER



ORDER THE COMPLETE
BOOK / EBOOK AT:

FYIPRESS.COM

TOO LATE FOR APOLOGIES

Anyone who met Peter Steele never, *ever* forgets it. Throughout the writing of this book, I talked to many people who met Peter, and every person's story has an element of humor, pathos, profundity, and danger, or some combination of those things.

The briefest brush with the man would leave an indelible impact. His imposing frame, basso profundo speaking voice, scathingly self-deprecating sense of humor and caustic wit ... these were his most identifiable traits, and there was a lot more just below that surface. His seemingly manic-depressive behaviors and too-rude-to-be-true jokes belied an extremely shy personality. He was a master of contradiction, most of it intentional. While he was hardly the stereotypical rock star, just as soon as he walked in the room, you would have known he was famous even if you didn't have a clue who he was. If you met him before he was touring the world and selling hundreds of thousands of records, you knew he was *going* to be a rock star. He couldn't have stayed employed by the New York City Parks and Recreation Department all his life, even if he always harbored a desire to return to the simplicity of no-surprises blue collar living. He had too much talent to spread wood chips and pick up garbage all his days; too much vision, too much to get off his chest, too many private demons to slay in public. He answered his calling with loads of exclamation marks; he worked his sense of humor into a kind of sophisticated vulgarity with which he laughed at the life he so angrily despised.

I met Peter Steele three times, and the first meeting was good enough to get my name in the thanks list of *Bloody Kisses*. I didn't deserve the honor, but Peter thought I did.

It was 1992 and I had just started my own fanzine. A fan of Peter's since the first Carnivore album and now wildly into his new band, Type O Negative, I used what paltry connections I had in the industry to secure an interview with Peter and Josh. *The Origin of the Feces* had just been released and the interview was memorable from the start. Someone miscommunicated regarding the interview schedule, so I was napping soundly one afternoon when I heard the phone ring. Bleary and barely aware, I found Peter Steele and Josh Silver on the other line. I made excuses, fumbled for my tape recorder, hooked it up and attempted to play the serious, investigative reporter. Fifteen seconds later I tossed my list of questions aside, realizing these guys weren't going to take anything seriously. They were very kind, however, darting from one silly subject to the next, keeping themselves and their interviewer amused for the 30 minute time slot until moving on to the next unsuspecting amateur journalist. Apparently I was such a good sport that Peter made sure to tell his publicist I should be thanked on their next album.

Eighteen months later, I met Peter a second time. Type O played a medium-size club in Des Moines, Iowa named Hairy Mary's. *Bloody Kisses* had just been released but had yet to grow into a phenomenon, wallowing in an uncomfortable purgatory between the loss of fans that didn't get its directional shift and the gain of new followers that eventually made the album an incredible commercial success. Type O played to about fifteen eager disciples that evening. Near the end of the set, Peter handed his Mogen David wine jug to the worshippers in the front row, gesturing for us to drink. We each took a sip as this guy who looked like a goth/doom version of Jesus Christ looked on. It felt like a very special communion.

After the show we went out to the band's bus for autographs. As he always was, Peter was there to give us what we wanted. I remember how sweet, gracious and cordial he was to each of us. Never being much into autographs, I asked Peter to dot a beauty mark onto one of the girls' faces on my *Bloody Kisses* shirt. He laughed, said with amusement "that's a new one," took his Sharpie to my shirt and honored the request. We all left feeling like we'd gotten face time with God.

The third time I met Peter was somewhere in Manhattan at 2 a.m. in some hallway in some club whose name I've long forgotten. It was around 1996 or so. We were there waiting for Lycia to take the stage after an interminable delay. We said hello, I reminded him of the mole he put on my shirt several years prior, he said he remembered that, we laughed, and he

went on to satisfy the attentions of the many other people who recognized him. By that time, he was on his way to becoming a household name.



Josh Silver told me at some point during the writing of this book: “The only way this would do Peter justice is if it pissed off everybody.”

Noted.

I learned a lot of amazing things about Peter Steele before I got into the thick of writing this book, and the thing that resonates the loudest is how incredibly, *insanely* possessive people are of this man.

“Peter wouldn’t want this book written.” “Peter was a private person.” “Peter would hate this.” On and on the peanut gallery opined. Some people forget that Peter himself was considering writing his own book someday. In 2003 he told *Ink19* magazine, “I have a title for it: *Give Pete a Chance*. I have tons of really funny, strange, sad and sick things that have happened to me that are just unbelievable. Stories about school, or family or tour stories—misadventures. Maybe someday, when I get my head screwed on correctly, I will pursue this seriously.” He never got his head screwed on correctly—at least not long enough to write his book—so you’ll have to settle for this one. (Peter talked about writing his own book more than once, too, offering another title idea, *White Dope on Punk*, a paraphrase of the Tubes song “White Punks on Dope”.)

Why *wouldn’t* Peter want this book written? Because he was a private person? A guy who posed in the nude, rock hard, in *Playgirl* magazine, was “private”? A guy that revealed so many fears, insecurities and struggles in his lyrics, for decades, was a private person? Just as this book was nearing completion, Josh Silver told me this: “What’s great about being dead is you really don’t care what people remember. That concept is only romantic during life.”

As well as Josh knew Peter, Josh never tried to tell me what Peter would want. In fact, most people acting as Peter’s self-appointed posthumous mouthpieces weren’t people that ended up having much to offer this book. This phenomenon of people taking it upon themselves to speak for Peter after his death, to apparently know what Peter would and wouldn’t want, is the domain of the numerous losers and hangers-on Peter tried so desperately to shake off while he was alive.

But I get why Peter Steele makes people so incredibly possessive. He had this power, this way of making people feel like *they* were the star, like *they* were the center of the universe, even if it was clearly Peter who was the center of the universe in any room he walked into. Peter's concern and attentiveness was genuine. He could make even the most insecure person feel like a million dollars, despite having numerous insecurities of his own. It's why he continues to command loyalty and reverence. It's why girls who admitted they only met him for 40 minutes say that albums such as *Bloody Kisses* and *October Rust* were written about *them*. Had Peter wanted to be a cult leader rather than a songwriter or a municipal worker, he would have been the greatest and most dangerous cult leader in the history of cult leaders. We should feel grateful he left us with so much amazing music rather than a pile of psychotically-damaged disciples.



Early in the process of this book's creation, some hubbub was made of the fact that the surviving members of Type O Negative did not want to talk to me on record. This was disappointing, but I've come to understand it. Each member assured me it was nothing personal. Josh even eventually offered some respectful correspondence via email, even if it was limited and near the end of this book's creation. Sal Abruscato, Type O Negative co-founder and original drummer, said it was simply too difficult to speak about Peter within a project of this magnitude. As for Johnny Kelly and Kenny Hickey, they had apprehension for various reasons. And it seemed like they too were still harboring pain from Peter's death. Not only did they lose their careers the day Peter died, they lost an incredibly special friend. This has to be respected.

Soul on Fire is a story of many different viewpoints, of many different truths and even untruths. I have tried to avoid or correct the untruths wherever possible in telling this story, and where I cannot possibly know the story, I let those who were there tell it for me.

Peter would probably ignore or shrug off the kind of attention he gets throughout this book. The sad fact is that he's not here to pass judgment on it. But the guy was a great sport. He could laugh at himself and did often. I hope he'd laugh at some of this if he was able to read it, and I hope he wouldn't kill me for using this as an excuse to exalt him. It's definitely not

an attempt to speak for him. Nobody has that authority, although many have tried since his death.

Pass the wine jug around wherever you are, Peter. Whoever is in your circle of friends and family now loves you like the rest of us among the living do. We're all with you, man, laughing and crying and triumphing right along with you.

— Jeff Wagner, October 2014