



# **Painfully Rich: J. Paul Getty and His Heirs**

*John George Pearson*

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Oil tycoon J. Paul Getty created the greatest fortune in America - and came close to destroying his own family in the process. Of his four sons who reached manhood, only one survived relatively unscathed. One killed himself, one became a drug-addicted recluse and the third had to bear the stigma all his life of being disinherited in childhood.

The unhappiness continued into the next generation, with the name Getty, as one journalist put it, 'becoming synonymous for family dysfunction'. Getty's once favourite grandson John Paul Getty III was kidnapped by the Italian mafia who cut off his ear to raise a ransom and, after a lifetime of drink and drugs, became a paraplegic. His granddaughter Aileen has AIDS. And the Getty family itself has been torn apart by litigation over their poisoned inheritance.

But did the disaster have to happen? John Pearson, who has specialized in biographies of families as varied as the Churchills, the British Royal Family, the Devonshires and the Krays, sets out to find the answer. The result, first published in 1995, is a fascinating saga of an extraordinary dynasty.

He traces much of the trouble to the bizarre character of the avaricious, sex-obsessed billionaire, J. Paul Getty himself - and demonstrates how much of his behaviour has been repeated in succeeding generations. He describes the famous kidnapping of his grandson in graphic detail, revealing how the old man's attitude added considerably to the boy's sufferings. And he shows how the family has coped with the latest modern scourges: drugs and AIDS.

For *Painfully Rich* is not a hopeless story. While some of the family have been damaged by the Getty legacy, others have saved themselves from disaster, most notably the cricket-loving philanthropist, J. Paul Getty Jr. Pearson's moving story of his recovery from drugs and deep personal tragedy shows that there is hope for future generations of this stricken family - and demonstrates that money can be used to buy survival and even happiness.

## **Painfully Rich: J. Paul Getty and His Heirs Details**

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# **From Reader Review Painfully Rich: J. Paul Getty and His Heirs for online ebook**

## **Jill Meyer says**

The other day I saw the movie "All the Money in the World". Filmed by Ridley Scott, the movie stars Michelle Williams and Christopher Plummer, who took over the role of J Paul Getty AFTER the filming had been finished. He was put in to replace Kevin Spacey and I'd love to read how the film's J Paul Getty's scenes were reshoot and all the publicity material was changed. Another story, I guess... Anyway, the movie was excellent and I was intrigued by the Getty family, so I downloaded and read British author John Pearson's book, "All the Money in the World", originally published as "Painfully Rich" in the mid-1990's.

John Pearson's book covers the entire J Paul Getty family, from Getty's parents - his father build up the family's first oil fortune - to Getty's grandchildren. The part about the kidnapping in Italy of Paul Getty III in the early 1970's is not a major part of the book, but covered well enough that a viewer who goes to the book after seeing the movie will be satisfied with the information given. The book is actually a well-written family biography which is unbiased in who and what is covered. The warts and the roses of the family are all covered.

I can highly recommend both the movie and the book on which it is based.

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## **Tera says**

It's an interesting story, but where did the author get his information? No list of sources, not a single footnote. This book is also in need of an editor.

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## **Cooper says**

The Getty's prove that money does not buy happiness.

I haven't seen the movie, "All The Money In The World", but this autobiography certainly tells a story of how a family can become incredibly dysfunctional. From J. Paul Getty's upbringing by strict religious parents, to the slight he felt when his father died and basically disinherited him, to the various marriages, children, and fortunes he made, this book was an intriguing look into a fascinatingly flawed family.

Great read and now looking forward to the movie. Having read the book, it gives you a little bit more insight as to why J.Paul wouldn't pay for his grandson's ransom.

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## **Stephanie Hutabarat says**

Really a good book, it's a cliché I suppose that somehow even you have money there is something empty in

your soul. 3 stars for this

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## **J Eseltine says**

Not the best-written book but an interesting story.

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## **Realini says**

All the Money in the World based on the book by John Pearson

This motion picture has probably had more buzz surrounding the postproduction, re- shooting and financial aspects, than discussion over the merits or lack thereof of a feature that has a nomination for an Academy Award.

Christopher Plummer, at the age of 88 (!) has played the role of the obnoxious, despicable, greedy, and psychopathic to a certain degree, richest man of his time and for all history up to 1973- John Paul Getty. Nevertheless, the excellent, veteran Oscar winner and nominated for this part for another Academy Award for Best Actor in a Supporting role and the oldest to get this nod, was not the first choice, but came after director Ridley Scott had decided to replace the original star, Kevin Spacey, in the aftermath of scandals surrounding his alleged abuse of teenage boys.

The production has taken to re-shoot the scenes involving John Paul Getty and called the other actors involved- Michelle Williams as Gail Harris, the daughter in law of the villainous, heartless tycoon and Mark Wahlberg as Fletcher Chase, the man who tries to help the mother recuperate her son. However, the new scenes were paid with over one million- was it one point seven million dollars- in the case of the male star and only with something like eighty dollars per day for Michele Williams, a huge discrepancy that has highlighted yet again the discriminations that women still have to face, even in highly paid positions.

Alas, some may feel that neither Ms. Williams, nor Mark Wahlberg have had their best performances in this motion picture about greed, love, hope, courage, vitality, recklessness, indifference and humanity. Early on, a group of criminals in Italy abducts John Paul Getty III –portrayed by a promising artist called Charlie Plummer- a coincidence, since he is not related to Christopher Plummer-.

One of the most important villains, the one who will both assist the felons and try to help poor young John to survive the ordeal and come out with as little trauma and physical damage as possible, is played by one of the best actors in the world, Romain Duris aka Cinquanta.

John Paul Getty is not just the richest man in the world, but also a billionaire who has invested vast sums in works of art- that have finally adorned the museum Getty, but only after his demise-and he has a reputation as a savvy, well versed, knowledgeable collector, who offers a gift to his favorite grandson.

This man is The Miser from the paly by Moliere and it is surprising to see him tell the story of a statuette, which he has found in the market, where a man was asking for \$ 20 –was it? - and it took the billionaire one hour to take the price down to \$ 10 for a work of art that he estimates at over one million.

If this looks like an outrageous, cheap game played by the richest man of the planet, it must also be said that a classic of positive psychology, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, author of the archetypal Flow, mentions the example of an Italian art dealer who would refuse a client who does not negotiate, because he is “in the zone” when haggling, without this negotiation there is no Flow.

Nevertheless, when pressed by the demands of the kidnappers, Gail Harris decides to sell the valuable gift and travels to the Sotheby’s auction house to try to obtain the million dollars or more for the expensive possession, only to be told that the object is actually worth only \$ 15.

One lesson from this incident and the whole story might be to think twice or more about rejecting a share of the fortune, which is what Ms. Harris had done, when she divorced her husband, she specified that she wants no part of the Getty wealth; she only wants custody of her children.

When the criminals ask for seventeen million dollars, the richest man’s response is that he will not pay, when further asked, he insists he has no money to spare, it is a difficult time and when Fletcher Chase mentions the oil crisis which brings Getty so much more, the latter still refuses to do anything for his unfortunate relative. Meanwhile, as the gangsters saw that the mother has nothing and the wealthy old man does not play ball- he even speaks to the press and refers to his many relatives claiming that there is no way he would give in, because after that he would have to pay millions every day- they mutilate the poor boy.

Cinquanta plays a double game, calling the mother and warning her about the intentions of the other members of the gang, but as part of this complicated position, he is the one who holds young Paul down, when a doctor comes to cut one ear off, to be presented to the family and convince them that other anatomical parts would follow if the millions do not materialize.

A newspaper offers \$ fifty thousand for the right to print the gory images, insisting that they know that the mother has no money and therefore this sum could help- Gail Harris rejects the notion of trading with the suffering and trauma of her beloved son, but has a brilliant idea, asking for one thousand copies of the newspaper in return for the copyright.

She sends the big packages to the residence- palace actually- of the wealthiest but also poorest man on earth- destitute not financially, but emotionally- and this appears to work as the heinous Getty pays more attention to the issue and finds that there is a way to deduct some tax from this kidnapping.

Loathsome as he is, he wants to offer a loan to his son, for tax purposes, since there is not legal benefit from paying ransom, and he wants in exchange that his daughter in law would give away the custody of the children.

Most critics have been happy with this motion picture, but you may find it less rewarding than expected, unless you consider Hamlet:

“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so”

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## **James says**

Interesting description of the travails of the Getty family. In this case, the mechanics of the family were set in motion by the patriarch, J. Paul Getty, who was sexually insatiable and could not abide being tied down by a

family, so he serially married young women and then divorced them when they became pregnant or shortly afterward, all while keeping innumerable mistresses on the side. His five sons all grew up twisted, and one of them killed himself/overdosed, another descended into drug-induced monasticism for over two decades, a third died at twelve of a botched operation while pleading for his father's presence. A fourth was cut out of the fortune entirely, and the fifth managed to become a composer and be relatively normal. In the next generation, several children rebelled and suffered grievous physical harm from AIDS, torture by kidnappers, and drug addiction. The book only goes up to 1995, so isn't clear if the family is still suffering. One of the grandchildren is working to make the family more normal, and it appears the destruction and disbursement of the trust may resolve the terrible fights over money the children have suffered, but that remains to be seen. Well-written book that utilizes heavily one of the ex-wives of J. Paul Getty II and doesn't go into enough detail about the other sons, but valuable and interesting to read none the less.

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### **Heather Fineisen says**

I went to the movie last weekend and was enthralled. I wanted to know more about the Getty family and the infamous kidnapping of Paul number 3. The book expands on the movie and hits just the right balance between gossipy and informative. The movie is a bit different in places when it comes to the kidnapping, but both book and movie are worth your time if the subject interests you. See the movie first.

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### **Entre letras y cámaras says**

Para leer la reseña al completo, haz click [aquí](#).

Antes del estreno de la película del mismo nombre, Harpercollins Ibérica editó el pasado mes de febrero el libro que recoge un amplio relato biográfico por toda la familia Getty. Aunque se cuenten los mismos hechos que en la cinta dirigida por Ridley Scott, esta obra escrita por John Pearson aporta muchos más detalles acerca del que fuera en su momento el hombre más rico de la historia.

El libro que comienza con unos agradecimientos de Pearson a toda la gente que ha hecho posible escribir algo tan complejo, como son las personas pertenecientes a la familia Getty, ya que si no habría encontrado muchos problemas que seguramente acabarían en posibles juicios por derechos. También me gustaría remarcar la inclusión de un árbol genealógico de la familia Getty, para que así el lector no se pierda en el caso de que algún nombre no le suene de entre los muchos que salen en la historia.

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### **Nikki says**

Kindle version needs editing... poor grammar and did not capitalize AIDS correctly. Decent & quick read for those too young to remember.

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## GoldGato says

Admit it, we are all drawn to stories about the wealthy and their experiences with how they are affected by having too much moola. In reading this book, I thought about the story of King Midas and how he wished that everything he touched would turn to gold. Of course, if the food you touch turns to gold, you can't eat.

J. Paul Getty touched too much food with his hands of gold.

The book does a good job of explaining the Getty fortune and who was affected by it. This was really a family in turmoil, especially Monsieur Miser. The author also looks at the grandson who was kidnapped and had his ear cut off when the Miser didn't want to pay the ransom.

Still, Mr. Getty gave us the magnificent Getty Villa in Malibu and the fantastic Getty Museum in Brentwood. Thank you for that. Plus, I can remember seeing Gordon Getty using public transportation in San Francisco and just enjoying life. So not everyone gets affected the wrong way with having too much gold, but beware the tides of Midas.

Book Season = Summer (cry me a river)

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## Greg says

2.5 stars ... I do recall the events of '73 when Getty III was kidnapped and the recoil I felt when hearing (no pun intended) of his ear being cut off. Didn't quite match the disgust when his grandfather refused to pay the ransom though ... not as much from a principled stand as the fact he was a monumental tight arse. Purchased this book - republished from the original version 'Painfully Rich' to cash in on the movie - to get more detail on the kidnapping, but also to find out more about JP Getty. However, for me, the book was disappointing as it largely centred on 'rich people's problems' where I would have preferred a greater focus on how Getty accumulated his incredible wealth. Ultimately, the book ended up more like an episode of Dynasty or Dallas and really dragged for the last 50 or so pages where the author sways from scathing to borderline sycophancy.

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## Nikki says

Happened before I was born so history was intriguing. Not a must read.

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## Mandy says

If ever there were a case to be made for the old adage that money can't buy happiness, this sorry tale of the extended Getty family would be it. An exploration of Jean Paul Getty himself from his origins to his many heirs, it's a sorry tale of a dysfunctional family par excellence. Getty himself remains ultimately unknowable and I never felt I gained any insight into his inner being – perhaps he didn't have one but was merely a man of straw with a knack of making more and more money. It's a really sad and depressing story. What a



miserable lot they all were and are. The effect of money on this family was catastrophic and far-reaching and I saw little signs of redemption even in the younger generation. A fascinating, if disturbing, examination of the getting and spending of vast wealth.

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