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Hard Love: A California Memoir

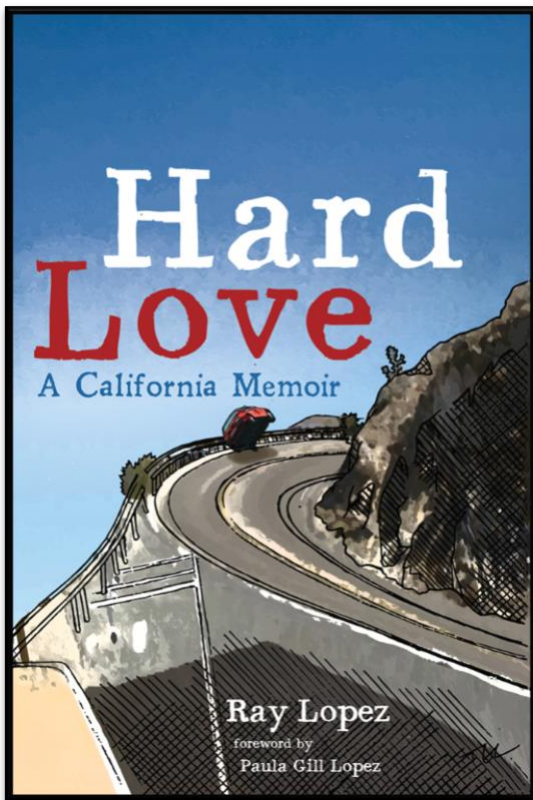
by Ray Lopez

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New Title from Ray Lopez
Hard Love: A California Memoir



From the author of *Hard Knocks: Memoir of a Small Moment*, *Hard Love* is the second of three memoirs and picks up where *Hard Knocks* leaves his readers. It describes the author's immaturity as a young Christian living with his wife in California and his continuing struggles with alcoholism. Like Paul's discussion of his dilemma as a Christian in Romans 7:15, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." It also follows Lopez's continuing struggle with depression and his wrestling between his conscience and his flesh, reminiscent of T. S. Elliot's lament in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." The narrative describes the radical way in which God heals Lopez from alcoholism, which saves his marriage and leads to the beginning of successful academic and professional careers (employment as a federal probation officer, receiving a master's degree in English from UC Berkeley), the birth of a daughter in Berkeley, and the blessings received through becoming part of a local Baptist church. The memoir covers fourteen years living in California and ends with a flight back east to relocate in Connecticut.

Ray Lopez is an evangelist, writer, and poet. He also works as a mitigation specialist in federal death penalty cases after retiring in 2016 from a twenty-six-year career as a federal probation officer. Born in Brooklyn in 1959 and raised on Long Island during the 1960s and 1970s, he journeyed through racism, Catholicism, the counterculture, alcoholism, drug addiction, hospitalization, and jail to find hope in Christ. He earned his master's degree from UC Berkeley in English in 1988 and has only recently returned to creative writing. *Hard Love* is his second memoir and his third memoir, *Hard Faith*, will be coming out soon.



Interview with Ray Lopez

Why have you written three memoirs from your life, rather than a traditional longer narrative?

These seasons of my life are all so different and distinct, I decided to publish them separately to give my readers a sense of that experience. Some of the readers of my first book felt that it was too short and ended abruptly leaving them wanting to know what happened next. Exactly what I was hoping for.

Many of your stories are about difficult and painful experiences. What was it like writing about these times in your life?

It was therapeutic. God's written word is healing and therapeutic. Writing these books, over the past couple of years has lifted me out of the pit of depression I found myself in after my father died in July 2018. I wrote the second and third books during the pandemic.

You end each chapter with scripture. How important is God's word to your life and your writing?

It is foundational, the anchor for everything. Every thought, feeling and experience known to man can be found in the Bible and applied to every moment of life. I love God's word. He's given me many verses to memorization and I rejoice when I am able to speak those words into the lives of others.

What do you hope for your readers?

I hope my readers will connect with one or more of the battles God has brought me through: racism, alcoholism, drug addiction, mental health conditions (depression, bipolar), hospitalization, incarceration, and find hope in God's promises of healing and redemption.

How does your work as a mitigation specialist in death penalty cases influence your writing?

I am so blessed to be able to do this work. It sharpens my heart and amplifies my gratitude. I am blessed to be able to minister to some of my clients, and several have accepted Christ. I give my clients my books and encourage them to write about their own lives. Some have taken up this challenge and I am looking forward to working with them to help them grow as individuals and writers.

Your third Memoir, *Hard Faith*, will be released this coming winter. What's next for you as a writer?

I have begun my first work of fiction, an amazing story based on the life of a friend who went from being a mobster/murderer to being an artist/healer.

An Excerpt from *Hard Love: A California Memoir*

The Drinking Game

There are ways to measure addiction in small moments, like emptying the Incredible Hulk bank—that Paula bought me as a gift, to find enough change for a box of wine, or selling your collection of 100 vinyl LPs for 50 bucks . . . which buys a couple of cases of Michelob and a few bottles of cheap wine. We had it all, from Beethoven to Hendrix, most in mint condition.

I come from a long line of highly functional alcoholics. My Dad, for example, the inventor of the Lopez Feed, which students read about in textbooks on electrical engineering, has 50 patents in his name and was awarded the highest honors in his field. A highly functional drunk is very organized, unless they have executive functioning deficits, which I do not. The top priority of each day is to plan and secure the daily alcohol ration.

On a normal day, I must first determine if there is an adequate supply of beer and wine, and then casually think about the rest of the day. Working out always comes first, then a nap on the weekends, and then after a protein-filled lunch, the drinking begins. Ironically, other than the massive alcohol consumption, we are living healthy lives with plenty of exercise and a good diet. Otherwise, if it's a scheduled event, like a concert or some other social gathering, it must first be established whether there will be alcohol present in order to determine whether you should bring your own. If it is a venue where alcohol is prohibited, you must either drink an adequate amount before, or preferably, scheme a way to bring in the booze, undetected, and drink fast, undetected. Achieving this criterion brings with it not only a feeling of peace, but also excitement. And intellectualizing. I don't drink every day. I don't drink at work. I am highly motivated to finish my shift on that third day by the thought of the 6-pack I will finish off on the drive down the mountain. I can drive drunk and have only been pulled over twice.

The first time, Paula and I decide it's a great idea to get a case of beer, throw it in a cooler with ice and take an evening drive down to Oceanside. We finish off a few before our departure. Oceanside is about 20 miles south of San Clemente. We get down there, drive through the center of town to see what's happening, and I get pulled over by Oceanside cops. They say I drove through a red light, smelled alcohol on my breath, and asked me to get out of the car to complete a sobriety test. I follow the finger, touch my nose, say the alphabet (forward, thank God), and as I begin the heel-to-toe walk of balance, Paula leans out the window and starts cheering me on, just like we're back in high school on the football field. "Ray Lopez, he's our man. If he can't do it nobody can!" This is quite irresponsible of her, and she is appropriately reprimanded by the officer with a threat of arrest should she fail to cease and desist as ordered. I'm in the zone. I pass and receive a ticket for going through a red light. The officers do not look inside the cooler Paula is sitting on and do not find the remains of our case of beer thrown casually in the back of the van.

Praise for *Hard Love: A California Memoir*

“Ray Lopez gives his raw testimony without sugarcoating. The journey on these pages is one of faith, family, legacy, and difficulty. Transformation comes through struggle, and the struggle has ensured a freedom that Ray now lives and shares, giving the reader hope for any impossible situation. Ray’s memoirs will leave you with one conclusion . . . only God could do that!”

—Gina Blaze, codirector of the New England Prayer Center and author of *Provoking Thoughts and Clean Love*

“*Hard Love*, Ray Lopez’s second memoir, is about the beginnings of an improbable transformation, filled with pain and challenges, but also resilience. This book breaks self-centeredness. Ray has a unique way of crafting his innermost thoughts through prose, poetry, and humor.”

—Vincent Carbone, teacher, artist, and author of *Distracted Driving . . . Crosses the Line*

“A wonderful book, full of life, joys and wounds, losses and recoveries.”

—Donald W. Markos, retired professor of English, Cal State East Bay, and author of *Ideas in Things: The Poetry of William Carlos Williams*

