



Living to Tell the Tale: A Guide to Writing Memoir

Jane Taylor McDonnell

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"Writing is a second chance at life," writes Jane McDonnell. "I think all writing constitutes an effort to establish our own meaningfulness, even in the midst of sadness and disappointment."

In **Living to Tell the Tale**, McDonnell draws on this impulse, as well as on her own experiences as a writer and teacher of memoir, to give us what should become the definitive book on writing "crisis memoirs" and other kinds of personal narrative. She provides specific techniques and advice to help the writer discover his or her inner voice, recognize—and then silence—the inner censor, begin a narrative, and develop it with such aids as photographs and documents.

Citing many landmark works such as Maxine Hong Kingston's **The Woman Warrior** and Frank McCourt's **Angela's Ashes**, as well as unpublished writings, McDonnell shows how writers can recreate past experiences through memories, and imaginatively reshape material into the story that needs to be told. Each chapter concludes with exercises to help the writer grapple with particular problems, such as trying to write about experiences that are only partly recalled.

McDonnell also offers a list of recommended reading.

- Memoirs, such as Mary Karr's **The Liars' Club** (Penguin) have hit bestseller lists nationwide during the past year, and are of great interest to aspiring writers.

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