

## Some of My Favorite Memoirs

Jane Alison. ***The Sisters Antipodes***. Houghton Mifflin, 2009.

Alison's parents traded partners with her best friend's parents, splitting the two families geographically and creating psychological havoc for the children. Alison was always aware of the mirror image family on the other side of the world with a combination of jealousy, anger, and longing. Her story of how these emotions played out in the lives of the four daughters is very compelling stuff.

Jennifer Finney Boylan. ***She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders***. Broadway Books, 2003.

Boylan's gift, in this lovely, heartbreaking book, is to show us the desperation he felt at being a woman trapped in a man's body. Happily married, father of two children, a tenured professor, he took the risk to become the person he could no longer deny.

Jill Ker Conway. ***The Road From Coorain***. Knopf, 1989.

Home-schooled on a huge sheep ranch in the Australian outback, Conway's memoir of her struggle to find her way to independent adulthood has become a classic. The memoir ***True North*** follows her career in Canada and the U.S.

A.B. Facey. ***A Fortunate Life***. Viking Press, 1984.

Facey's childhood in the late 1890s in hardscrabble western Australia was filled with difficulties: orphaned by age 2, his relatives sent him out to do farm work at age 8. His fascinating life mirrors the history of his country and is remarkable for his unflinching courage and perseverance.

Peter Godwin. ***When a Crocodile Eats the Sun: A Memoir of Africa***. Little, Brown, 2007.

Godwin grew up in Zimbabwe in happier times; he returns to visit his aging parents and witnesses the violent collapse of the country he loved. His moving account of the English settlers, who remain despite the threats to their lives from a lawless and corrupt government, is very compelling.

Mary Gordon. ***Circling My Mother***. Pantheon, 2007.

A companion piece to her book about her father, ***The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search For Her Father***, Gordon deftly recalls her mother, Anna, who had been crippled by polio but lived a rich, active life, was the breadwinner of the family, and a devout Catholic.

Sara Hall. ***Drawn to the Rhythm: A Passionate Life Reclaimed***. W.W. Norton, 2002.

Hall was living a nightmare, with a husband who dictated that her life serve his needs alone, when she saw a solitary rower on Long Island Sound. From that inspirational moment, she borrowed a scull and practiced until she began to win races, winning back her confidence as well and literally rowing her way to freedom.

Adam Hochschild. ***Half the Way Home: A Memoir of Father and Son***. Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

Wealth is no guarantee of happiness, as we learn in this searing psychological study of father and son. Hochschild's father was distant and demanding, humiliating his son at every opportunity. It took years for him to understand the demons that drove his father.

Eva Hoffman. ***Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language***. Dutton, 1989.

When Hoffman's parents brought her to Vancouver, Canada, from Poland in the late 1950s, she suffered acutely from the loss of culture and language. This is the story of Hoffman's efforts to make a place for herself in America as the daughter of Holocaust survivors and as an exile from her beloved Cracow.

John. McGahern. ***All Will Be Well***. Knopf, 2006.

McGahern grew up in rural Ireland in the middle decades of the twentieth century, very close to his mother, who died when he was nine, leaving him and his siblings at the mercy of their vain and brutal father. Despite his hellish childhood, McGahern's love of the Irish countryside infuses this memoir with a wonderful lyricism.

Rachel Simon. ***Building a Home with My Husband: A Journey Through the Renovation of Love***. Dutton, 2009.

As Simon and her husband Hal renovate their old row house, every phase recalls an earlier time in her life, dredging up memories that help her examine and repair relationships in the present. Her insights about forgiveness, love, patience, tolerance, and commitment are universal and nourishing.

Tobias Wolff. ***This Boy's Life***. Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989.

Wolff's intense, beautifully crafted memoir is a tour de force of the coming of age genre, by turns chilling and funny. Wolff spent his teenage years locked in a battle of wills with an abusive stepfather, desperately creating a self that could escape and survive intact.