

Adult Memoirs for Teens

Appleman-Jurman, Alicia. ***Alicia: My Story***. Bantam Books, 1988.

Alicia was only nine years old when World War II began, and although she managed to elude death at the hands of Communists and Nazis, she lost her entire family. With incredible courage and nerve, she not only survived but ran a Jewish orphanage and led secret transports to Palestine.

Arana, Maria. ***American Chica: Two Worlds, One Childhood***. Dial Press, 2001.

Recalling her childhood as the daughter of a Peruvian father and an American mother, Arana tells how these competing cultures complicated and enriched her life. In Peru, she was taught to be a lady; on the Wyoming ranch of her mother's family, she learned how to shoot a gun and ride a horse.

Armstrong, Lance with Sally Jenkins. ***It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life***. Putnam, 2000.

Cancer and the Tour de France, deathly illness and incredible strength define Armstrong's life journey. Diagnosed with testicular cancer at age twenty-five and given only a fifty-fifty chance of survival, he went on to win international championships and become a father. Armstrong's plain spoken story is filled with the emotional highs and lows of a very full life.

Beah, Ishmael. ***A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier***. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Beah was a carefree pre-teen in his small Sierra Leone village, memorizing rap songs from American cassettes, when rebel attacks robbed him of home, friends, and family. At age 12 he was recruited into the civil war as a child soldier and trained to kill.

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

From early childhood, Boylan knew he was a girl trapped in a boy's body; in his early forties, a tenured professor, already married with children, he finally became Jennifer, risking everything he knew and loved to be the person he was always meant to be. With the skills of a fine novelist, Boylan makes the pain and joy of his journey vivid and compelling.

Cox, Lynne. ***Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long-Distance Swimmer***. Knopf, 2004.

From childhood, Lynne loved swimming long distances—at age 14 she swam across the 26 mile Catalina Channel and then the English Channel, setting a new record. Other remarkable swims followed, as she endured physical difficulties, harsh conditions, and encounters with sharks, always seeking greater challenges.

Cunxin, Li. ***Mao's Last Dancer***

Li was one of 6 brothers in a desperately poor rural Chinese family. At age eleven, he was picked for Madame Mao's ballet academy in Beijing. His steely determination to excel led to a cultural exchange program with the Houston Ballet. The story of how he fell in love with America and subsequently defected reads like adventure fiction.

Fox, Paula. ***Borrowed Finery***. Henry Holt, 2001.

Novelist and Newbery Award winning author Fox had an astonishingly awful childhood—as an infant, her uncaring, self-absorbed parents abandoned her at an orphanage. She was raised by a compassionate minister in upstate New York, but periodically her parents would appear, whisk her away and deposit her with strangers. This is a Dickensian tale, recounted without self-pity and with a writer's eye for the telling detail.

Grealy, Lucy. **Autobiography of a Face**. Houghton Mifflin, 1994.

At age 9, Grealy had surgery to remove a cancerous growth in her jaw; her disfigured face made her a target for taunts and stares at school and in the street. Radiation, chemotherapy and multiple surgeries forced her to cope with the isolation and shame of looking different and confront the value society places on physical beauty.

Rawicz, Slavomir. **The Long Walk: The True Story of a Trek to Freedom**. Harper, 1956.

Rawicz was arrested by the Russians as a spy in 1939, tortured, and sent to a labor camp in Siberia. He organized an escape with 6 other prisoners; they trekked south, from Siberia to India, across the Gobi Desert and the Himalayas. The story of how they cooperated to survive under impossible conditions is simply riveting.

Santiago, Esmeralda. **When I was Puerto Rican**. Vintage Books, 1994.

Santiago grew up in a tin shack in a rural Puerto Rican barrio, the oldest of 7 children with a mostly absent father. She describes a difficult but vibrant world, full of friends and relatives joyously celebrating life. Her move to Brooklyn as a young teenager thrust her into a drab, cold world, but fired her with ambition to use education as a way out.

Scheeres, Julia. **Jesus Land: A Memoir**. Counterpoint, 2005.

Scheeres grew up with two adopted black brothers in 1970s rural Indiana with parents whose fundamentalist religious beliefs papered over abuse and neglect. When her beloved brother David was sent to a Christian reform school in the Dominican Republic, she chose to join him. The racism, beatings, attempted rape, and hypocrisy they endured are recounted by Scheeres with frankness and sad longing for what could have been.

Small, David. **Stitches: A Memoir**. W.W. Norton, 2009.

For a reluctant reader, this graphic memoir uses very few words but has a powerful impact. Small grew up mentally abused by angry, unhappy parents. Told that he needed a simple operation on his neck, he woke up mute, a victim of his father's experiments with radiation. Small, a well-known children's illustrator, turns his talents on his own unhappy childhood with remarkable results.

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

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. His insight into his teenage years and the bizarre behavior of the adults around him makes this a tour de force of the genre, by turns chilling and very funny.

Additional titles:

Abu-Jaber, Diana. **The Language of Baklava**. Pantheon, 2005.

Allison, Dorothy. **Two or Three Things I Know for Sure**. Dutton, 1995.

Bechdel, Alison. **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic**. Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Bragg, Rick. **All Over but the Shoutin'**. Pantheon, 1997.

Brown, Cupcake. **A Piece of Cake**. Crown, 2006.

Callahan, Steven. **Adrift: 76 Days Lost at Sea**. Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

Chen, Da. **Colors of the Mountain**. Random House, 2000.

Conroy, Pat. **My Losing Season**. Doubleday, 2002.

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

Cox, Lynne. **Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long-Distance Swimmer**. Knopf, 2004.

Crutcher, Chris. **King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-Advised Autobiography**. Greenwillow Books, 2003.

Durrell, Gerald. **My Family and Other Animals**. Viking, 1957.

Fong-Torres, Ben. **Rice Room: Growing Up Chinese-American from Number Two Son to Rock 'n' Roll**. Hyperion, 1994.

Fuller, Alexandra. **Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood**. Random House, 2001.

Garis, Leslie. **House of Happy Endings**. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. **Wait Till Next Year**. Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Greenlaw, Linda. **The Hungry Ocean**. Hyperion, 1999.

Hickam, Homer. **Rocket Boys**. Delacorte, 1998 (also released as **October Sky**)

Hockenberry, John. **Moving Violations: War Zones, Wheelchairs, and Declarations of Independence**. Hyperion, 1995.

Jaffrey, Madhur. **Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India**. Knopf, 2006.

Jourdan, Carolyn. **Heart in the Right Place**. Algonquin Books, 2007.

Karr, Mary. **Liar's Club**. Viking, 1995.

McCourt, Frank. **Angela's Ashes**. Scribner, 1996.

Moehringer, J.R. **The Tender Bar**. Hyperion, 2005.

Nissel, Angela. **Mixed: My Life in Black and White**. Villard, 2006.

Obama, Barack. **Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance**. Times Books, 1995.

Opdyke, Irene Gut. **In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer**. Knopf, 1999.

Oufkir, Malika. **Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail**. Talk Miramax Books, 2001.

Owens, Mark and Delia Owens. **Cry of the Kalahari**. Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

Ryan, Terry. **The Prize Winner of Defiance Ohio: How My Mother Raised 10 Kids on 25 Words or Less**. Simon & Schuster, 2001.

Satrapi, Marjane. **Persepolis**. Pantheon, 2003.

Simon, Rachel. **Riding the Bus With My Sister: A True Life Journey**. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Swiller, Josh. **The Unheard: A Memoir of Deafness and Africa**. Henry Holt, 2007.

Trout, Nick. **Tell Me Where it Hurts: a Day of Humor, Healing and Hope in my Life as an Animal Surgeon**. Broadway Books, 2008.

Umrigar, Thrity. **First Darling of the Morning: Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood**. HarperCollins, 2004.

Walls, Jeannette. **The Glass Castle: A Memoir**. Scribner, 2005.

Warmbrunn, Erika. **Where the Pavement Ends: One Woman's Bicycle Trip Through Mongolia, China, and Vietnam**. Mountaineers Books, 2001.

Wolff, Geoffrey. **The Duke of Deception: Memories of My Father**. Random House, 1979.

Wong, Jade Snow. **Fifth Chinese Daughter**. Harper, 1950.