

Memoirs About Africa

Beah, Ishmael. ***A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier***. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. Beah was one of the child soldiers in the Sierra Leone civil war, trained to kill at the age of 12 after his village was destroyed and family murdered. His account of this hellish experience and how he survived is riveting.

Dinesen, Isak (pseud. of Karen Blixen). ***Out of Africa***. Crown, 1987 (1938).

Dinesen came to Kenya in 1913 as a newlywed and stayed on after her divorce. Through years of isolation and struggle on the farm, she developed reserves of courage and self-reliance, but her romantic connection with the landscape and the people is what brings this lyrical narrative to life.

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

Fuller grew up in Rhodesia, Zambia, and Malawi at the end of the colonial era; there was terrorism and war wherever she lived. The story of her family's eccentric lifestyle on isolated farms is told from a child's wide-eyed point of view with humor, insight, and love for the land. A later memoir, ***Scribbling the Cat***, is an intense account of a return visit.

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

A father's illness and death frame this moving story of change and loss. Journalist Godwin grew up in Zimbabwe, where his mother was a doctor and his father an engineer. When his father fell ill, Godwin returned to visit and record the violent collapse of the country, uncovering in the process his father's secret history.

Lessing, Doris. ***Under My Skin: Volume 1 of My Autobiography, to 1949***. HarperCollins, 1994.

Lessing writes about her childhood in rural Southern Rhodesia (she was born in 1919) and how she was determined to break free of her parents' expectations. She recounts how two failed marriages and involvement with the Communist Party set her on a fiercely independent course. Those who have read Lessing's early novels set in Africa will enjoy this glimpse of the raw materials.

Maathai, Wangari. ***Unbowed: A Memoir***. Knopf, 2006.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Maathai's deep connection to her Kenyan homeland was the foundation for a most remarkable career. In a time when girls were rarely educated, she left Kenya to earn a Ph.D, and started the Green Belt movement that spread across Africa as a force for women's rights and democracy.

Mandela, Nelson. **Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela.** Little, Brown and Co., 1994.

Mandela's dedication to the eradication of apartheid in South Africa brought him the Nobel Peace Prize, but only after long, terrible years of struggle including 27 years in prison. His elegant, reflective account starts with his childhood as the foster son of a tribal chieftain and charts his growing awareness of racial oppression and commitment to political action.

Markham, Beryl. **West With the Night.** North Point Press, 1983 (1942).

Markham came to East Africa as a small child in 1906 with her father. Her lyrical memoir describes her great love of the African landscape and people and her work as a horse trainer, but it is the sections on her career as a bush pilot in the 1930s that have made this work a well-loved classic.

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

A shared love of wildlife and adventure brought these two biologists to an isolated camp in the Kalahari Desert where they lived for 7 years, studying the wildlife and coping with privations of many kinds.

Packer, George. **The Village of Waiting.** Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2001. (1988).

This is an exceptionally insightful and realistic account of the two years Packer spent in a Togolese village as a Peace Corps volunteer in the 1980s.

Rogers, Douglas. **The Last Resort: A Memoir of Zimbabwe.** Harmony, 2009.

Rogers's parents stayed on in Zimbabwe as the country deteriorated and despite threats of violence and the very real risk of loss of life and their resort, Drifters. This is a poignant and funny tribute to their resilience and optimism in a world turned upside down.

Fiction set in Africa:

Bennett, Ronan. **The Catastrophist.** Simon & Schuster, 1999.

Coetzee, J.M. **Disgrace.** Viking, 1999.

Eprile, Tony. **The Persistence of Memory** W.W. Norton, 2004.

Gordimer, Nadine. **July's People.** Viking, 1981.

Kingsolver, Barbara. **The Poisonwood Bible.** HarperCollins, 1999.

Lessing, Doris. **The Grass is Singing.** Reprint, HarperPerennial, 2008.

Mahfouz, Naguib. **Palace Walk.** Anchor, 1990.

Smith, Alexander McCall. **The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency.** Anchor, 2002.