



The Art of Memoir

By Mary Karr

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Bestselling author and renowned professor Mary Karr offers a master class in the essential elements of great memoir—delivered with her signature wit, insight, and candor.

Credited with sparking the current memoir explosion, Mary Karr's *The Liars' Club* spent more than a year at the top of the New York Times list. She followed with two other smash bestsellers: *Cherry* and *Lit*, which were critical hits as well.

For thirty years Karr has also taught the form, winning teaching prizes at Syracuse. (The writing program there produced such acclaimed authors as Cheryl Strayed, Keith Gessen, and Koren Zailckas.) In *The Art of Memoir*, she synthesizes her expertise as professor and therapy patient, writer and spiritual seeker, recovered alcoholic and “black belt sinner,” providing a unique window into the mechanics and art of the form that is as irreverent, insightful, and entertaining as her own work in the genre.

Anchored by excerpts from her favorite memoirs and anecdotes from fellow writers' experience, *The Art of Memoir* lays bare Karr's own process. (Plus all those inside stories about how she dealt with family and friends get told—and the dark spaces in her own skull probed in depth.) As she breaks down the key elements of great literary memoir, she breaks open our concepts of memory and identity, and illuminates the cathartic power of reflecting on the past; anybody with an inner life or complicated history, whether writer or reader, will relate.

Joining such classics as Stephen King's *On Writing* and Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, *The Art of Memoir* is an elegant and accessible exploration of one of today's most popular literary forms—a tour de force from an accomplished master pulling back the curtain on her craft.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of September 2015: Thanks to celebrated works like *The Liar's Club*, *Lit*, and *Cherry*, many would argue that Mary Karr put memoirs on the map. She has a thing or two to say about that in *The Art of Memoir*, a distillation of over 30 years of writing and teaching the form. While it certainly should be required reading for anyone wanting to become the next Cheryl Strayed (whom Karr mentored), it has much on offer for those of us who have no intentions of laying ourselves bare on the page. By examining her favorite memoirs in her signature smart, irreverent style--and with contagious affection--Karr explains why they resonate with us: Memoirs are a means to make sense of a life; they reveal the sometimes skewed ways in which we see ourselves, and how those perceptions betray our frailties, and our strengths. If you're wondering if Karr touches on charlatan "memoirists" like infamous Oprah punching bag, James Frey, she does. But only to point out the important distinctions between the malleability of memory, and simply making stuff up. Also, why are we so gullible in believing those fictions? A warning that your reading list is going to grow the further you venture into this book—Karr's love for memoirs like Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation of a Beheading* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* just oozes off the page, and it's hard not getting some of that on you. You'll be better off if you just let it. --Erin Kodicek

Review

"Karr is a national treasure—that rare genius who's also a brilliant teacher. This joyful celebration of memoir packs transcendent insights with trademark hilarity. Anyone yearning to write will be inspired, and anyone passionate to live an examined life will fall in love with language and literature all over again." (George Saunders)

"Could have been called 'The Art of Living.'" (*San Francisco Chronicle*)

"Mary Karr has written another astonishingly perceptive, wildly entertaining, and profoundly honest book—funny, fascinating, necessary. *The Art of Memoir* will be the definitive book on reading and writing memoir for years to come." (Cheryl Strayed)

"Should be required reading for anyone attempting to write a memoir, but anyone who loves literature will enjoy it too." (*Wall Street Journal*)

"Terrific and deliciously readable guide." (*Entertainment Weekly*, "Must List")

"Full of Karr's usual wit, compassion and, perhaps most reassuringly, self-doubt. Her fans should be delighted—and they can't go wrong reading the books she discusses, including her own." (*Washington Post*)

"From a contemporary luminary of the form, Mary Karr's *The Art of Memoir* examines our enduring drive to make memory speak and to 'wring some truth from this godawful mess of a single life.'" (*Vogue*)

"*The Art of Memoir* is passionate and irreverent—and reminds us why we love a good memoir." (*Elle*)

"Mary Karr strikes a vein in *The Art of Memoir*." (*Vanity Fair*)

“Karr is such fun to read—who else would combine the name Nabokov and the phrase “out the wazoo” on her very first page?” (*New Yorker*)

“Engaging.” (*Chicago Tribune*)

“A veritable blueprint for the genre.... Lovers of the form and aspiring scribblers alike will relish this comprehensive appreciation of and guide to ‘writing the real self.’” (*O: The Oprah Magazine*)

“With a trio of notable memoirs (“The Liars’ Club,” “Cherry,” and “Lit”), Mary Karr is exquisitely qualified to write this book, a kind of compendium of advice, warning, and deep insight into what makes a personal history stick in a reader’s mind.” (*Boston Globe*)

“Karr really is an artist. *The Art of Memoir* attests to how hard she works at getting her words just right and how deeply she understands the way great writing works.” (*Slate*)

“Whip-smart.” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*)

“As useful for those of us who want to be better friends and lovers as it is for those of us who want to pen our life story.” (*More*)

“A master class on memoir, from a memoirist who pulls no punches.” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*)

“Lots of practical advice, a great reading list, examples you can bite into.” (*Houston Chronicle*)

“Karr’s own voice is consistent and authentic, as vivid, down-home, smart, profane and self-deprecating as it is in her own memoirs.” (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*)

“A celebration of the creative life.” (*Austin American-Statesman*)

“Enlightening....Fresh and heartfelt....Instructs and inspires through example and a love for the art of memoir.” (*Library Journal*, starred review)

“Karr write[s] exquisitely...and without pretense, often with raw authenticity....a must-read.” (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review)

“Snappy and witty, humorous just when it needs to be, yet plainspoken in the best way.” (*Shelf Awareness*)

“Karr’s sassy Texas wit and her down-to-earth observations about both the memoir form and how to approach it combine to make for lively and inspiring reading. A generous and singularly insightful examination of memoir.” (*Kirkus*)

From the Back Cover

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lawrence Weatherby:

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Cristen Washington:

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