

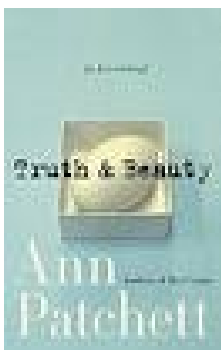
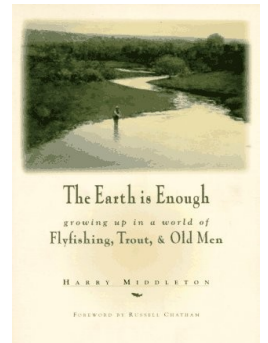
A Literary Magazine for the Maternally Inclined
<http://www.literarymama.com>

LITERARY
Mama

Now Reading: March 2008

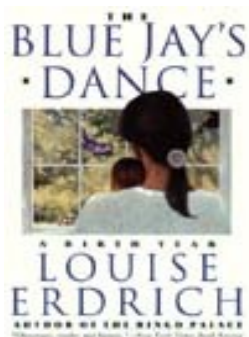
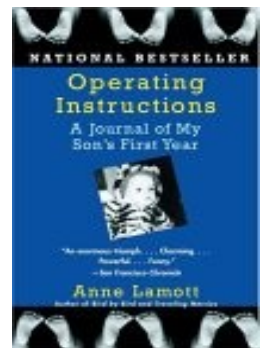
Memoirs and biographies provide us with opportunities to enter the lives of people we may never meet face to face, and our lives are enriched by reading about their experiences and personalities. This month Literary Mamas suggest their most essential titles.

Memoir is Senior Editor and Columnist Shari MacDonald Strong's favorite genre, her choices "shifting and changing." She narrowed her list to two: "Gorgeously written, *The Earth is Enough* by Harry Middleton is a haunting story about a boy who in 1965 is sent to the home of his uncle and grandfather, in the Ozarks, to recover from a terrible childhood tragedy.



Her second choice, "filled with juicy bits about writers and the writing life, is *Truth and Beauty* by Ann Patchett, a tale of the bestselling author's sometimes extraordinary, often strained relationship with her closest friend, noted author Lucy Grealy. I found both memoirs to be lovely and deeply moving, in their own ways."

Senior Editor and Columnist Caroline Grant suggests a perennial favorite. "My pick has to be Anne Lamott's *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*, which was the first piece of honest writing about motherhood that I read. I've reread it several times since my first grateful, laugh-out-loud, tears-in-my-eyes experience of her writing, and it still gets to me."



Operating Instructions also tops Columnist Libby Gruner's list, as well Louise Erdrich's memoir *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year*, "which is a composite portrait of her three pregnancies and experiences of early infancy. At any time, the baby described may be her first, second, or third daughter. She weaves them into a seamless whole, structuring the book around the seasons rather than any particular child's first year of life. Pregnant in the winter and delivering in spring, she manages to convey the rhythms of a natural cycle."

My Dog Skip by Willie Morris evokes fond memories for Literary Reflections Co-Editor Kathy Moran. "Morris' rich description of the Mississippi Delta undergirds his bittersweet and humorous memories of Skip and childhood friends. I read this book to my creative writing classes as an example of excellent writing, but would invariably end up crying through the last chapter, as I remembered my own childhood pets and visits to the small Missouri town of my maternal relatives."



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Columnist Elrena Evans' friend handed her a copy of *Girl Meets God* by Lauren F. Winner, saying "You have to read it -- she reminded me so much of you." Though Elrena "did chafe at some parts -- I'm not like that at all, I'd think -- I absolutely loved the book! Winner chronicles her journey in search of a faith, moving through Judaism and Orthodox Judaism and Episcopal Christianity with thoughtfulness, honesty, and wry humor. I found I resonated more than anything with the way her mind works, and as I read, I saw why my friend insisted that I give it a go.



"Here's a taste: 'I gave away all my Jewish books and let go of all my Jewish ways, but I realized, as I spent time with other Christians, that Judaism shaped how I saw Christianity. I thought I had given away all my Jewish things, but found that I hadn't. I'd just given away some books and mezuzot and candlesticks. I hadn't given up the shape in which I saw the world, or the words I knew for God, and those shapes and the words were mostly Jewish.'"



A friend also introduced Columns Editor Stephanie Hunt to "a mesmerizing book and quick read (perfect for the mama attention span) *Not Quite What I Was Planning: Six Word Memoirs* by Famous and Obscure Writers by Larry Smith and Rachel Fershleiser. They're fun, fascinating, witty, disturbing -- like reading revealing fortune cookie blurbs. A few of my favorites: "Put whole self in, shook about.' 'Indelibly tenacious, I read and breed.' and 'Detergent girl -- Bold. Tide. Cheer. All.' And so, here's mine -- 'Now I'll write my own; you?'" (Also, look for Columnist Libby Gruner's memoir in this collection!)

Creative Nonfiction Editor and Columnist Susan Ito found Gioconda Belli's *The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War* to be an "incredibly moving memoir by a revolutionary, poet and mother." "Belli, author of the acclaimed novel *The Inhabited Woman* (1994), could have simply enjoyed the benefits of upper-class Nicaraguan life as a young wife and mother, but privileged domesticity could not contain her questing spirit. She soon launched a successful advertising career in Managua, found her soul mates among writers and revolutionaries, and became both a celebrated poet and a Sandinista, risking her life in her country's fight for freedom. With motherhood and love affairs under fire, gun running and media work, poetry prizes and exile, and ceaseless combat against misogyny and despair, Belli's powerfully told story reveals the symbiotic give-and-take of body and soul, art and politics, and altruism and pragmatism that make up the human continuum." (Booklist review)

