



Privileged Perspective in Memoir: Building the Bridge of Trust by Trusting the Reader

by Tara Caimi

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Credibility is one of the most important qualities of an effective memoir, yet sometimes the truth is, indeed, stranger than fiction. What happens when real-life events are truly unbelievable? The memoirist's job is not only to infuse the essence of truth into those events that would otherwise be too outrageous to believe, but also to employ creative techniques that will enhance the emotional response to factual events.

One might be inclined to believe memoir has the advantage of genre in that simply labeling the work as nonfiction should imply the truth of it, but the line between fact and fiction can be tenuous. As fiction-writing techniques are often applied to create provocative and compelling nonfiction, the author of memoir must work even harder to achieve credibility, maintaining the factual elements while using creative techniques to increase the literary quality of the work

Establishing and maintaining credibility in both the content and the narrator helps to win the reader's trust and enhance the overall believability of the memoir, but trust is never a one-way street. In order for the work to be effective, the author must not only gain the trust of her readers, she must also express a level of trust, showing readers that she believes in their ability to enter her story and relate to the world she has re-created. In essence, the author of memoir builds the foundation of a bridge of trust by reaching out to the reader and relying on that reader to complete the bridge through personally relating to the story or otherwise participating in the interpretation of the events presented.

Some traditional and effective techniques that are often used to build trust and establish the credibility of the memoir's narrator and content are self-reflection and commenting. An author, for example, can look back on the events she has described and reflect on their meaning or comment on their impact, a method which leaves little room for doubt or interpretation with regard to the author's intended meaning. Through this method, the reader becomes more of a consumer than an active participant in the work. The role of the reader changes as the author of memoir employs alternative techniques to establish credibility and build trust—techniques that potentially push the limits of the nonfiction genre, while still hovering within the boundaries of truth. Such techniques include elements of the dramatic point of view, such as imbuing unspoken meaning in objective presentations of scenery, events, characters, and other descriptive details.

Objective description can allude to alternative meanings for a variety of elements, such as the mental and emotional states of characters or the emotional effects of specific events on the narrator. It is not necessary for the reader to have specific background information or other historical knowledge to interpret the implications of objective descriptions. The reader needs only her own set of personal experiences through which she may relate to the levels of possible meaning within the descriptive information presented by the author. In this way, the reader participates in the work by translating silence into

meaning based on descriptive cues the author provides.

For the memoirist, objective presentation through craft elements usually associated with the dramatic point of view becomes a critical tool for character development due to the inherently limited perspective of the narrator. Through this technique, the memoirist may develop characters through dialogue and physical description, as well as through implied meaning within descriptions of events, setting, and abstract concepts. The methods different authors use to imply multiple levels of meaning vary, as I will show by examining the use of this technique in the works of five authors whose memoirs employ very different styles: Dorothy Allison, Mary Karr, David Sedaris, Abigail Thomas, and Jeannette Walls.

Regardless of style, the author's use of implied meaning through objective presentation of details can give the reader a larger role in the emotional and intellectual interpretation of the work, thereby acting as a vehicle of trust. Crucial to the success of such a technique, however, is the foundational requirement of credibility. When examining the function and importance of credibility, we see that persona serves as a driving force that can be used to establish credibility and begin the crucial task of building the bridge of trust.

Though there are many sides to any one story, for the memoirist there is only one—that which is told from the perspective of the narrator. It is to this narrator the memoirist must remain true. In her book *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative*, Vivian Gornick

defines persona as a voice inside the writer who tells the story from the appropriate perspective. Gornick states,

In nonfiction, the writer has only the singular self to work with. So it is the other in oneself that the writer must seek and find to create movement, achieve a dynamic. Inevitably, the piece builds only when the narrator is involved not in confession but in this kind of self-investigation, the kind that means to provide motion, purpose and dramatic tension. ¹

Though Gornick states that the author of memoir “has only the singular self to work with,” the differences between the person living through the events of the story and the person telling the story cannot be ignored. It is, for example, quite common for a significant amount of time to pass before an author will write about traumatic or otherwise formative events through which she has lived. During that time, an essential transformation takes place. The author’s perspective shifts, allowing her to see the events of the past through a very different lens. It is through this shift that the persona is born. The persona represents a combination of the person who experienced the events and the person who, at a later point in time, recounts the events for the reader. The resulting narrator becomes a combination of these selves, providing the reader with a privileged perspective that would not otherwise be possible. Persona, essentially, provides the reader with a view of the story from two perspectives at once. The narrator of combined perspectives is able to interpret the events in a relatable way for

the reader by providing privileged information about the events as they occur—information that only a person looking back on the events could know or otherwise understand.

In her memoir *Safekeeping*, Abigail Thomas illustrates this privileged perspective in a less traditional, while somewhat more obvious way than many other authors choose to employ. Thomas presents one view of herself in her youth and another view of herself in later years, sometimes writing in the third person as she looks back on the events of her past. The book evolves through constant comparisons of these selves, revealing a surprising disparity between the two. Of her younger self, Thomas writes, “She was afraid that there was no herself, that somehow she had gotten into this body, but she was too small for it, tiny. She was fooling people who thought she was real, and here.”² Looking back as a grandmother, Thomas can see what she couldn’t see when she was younger. “She was like the eye of a hurricane, high wind and water all around. She would (if she could) put her arm around the girl she’d been and try to tell her Take it easy, but the girl would not have listened. The girl had no receptors for Take it easy.”³

Regardless of whether the memoir is written in first, second, third person, or any combination thereof, it is the persona of the narrator that drives the memoir, steering everything from style to language to tone to structure from a particular perspective. Once this perspective is established, the author is free to apply more creative elements of craft to continue building the work. But in order to stay

true to the nonfiction genre, certain restrictions apply.

Though persona can transcend the boundaries of time, it remains one person's perspective or set of perspectives, and therefore, by its very nature, it is limited. One of the first methods an author can use to establish and maintain the credibility of the narrator is to stay true to the persona of the work. When telling the events of a story as they were experienced by the narrator when she was a child, for example, as Jeannette Walls does in her memoir *The Glass Castle*, it is important to use simple language and a child-like voice. Walls writes, "Mom also believed in letting nature take its course. She refused to kill the flies that always filled the house; she said they were nature's food for the birds and lizards. And the birds and lizards were food for the cats." ⁴

Because a child would not know every word or description an author must use to accurately tell her story, the combined perspectives become crucial. But the author does not have to place both perspectives at the forefront, as Abigail Thomas did in the previous example. When recounting the events as they were experienced by a child, the author can use techniques that significantly minimize the presence of the older and wiser perspective, to the extent of making it seem nonexistent. The tone, style, and voice can do enough to effectively establish the appropriate persona in situations where using complex sentences that would be unlikely to emerge from the mind of a child would threaten to crack the foundation of the world the author is trying to re-create through the eyes of that child.

This technique of emphasizing one or multiple perspectives throughout the work can help the reader relate not only to the child who actually lived through the events, but also to the adult that child eventually became. This is the privileged perspective through which the reader can get to know the narrator on a deeper and more personal level. In this way, the privileged perspective offered through persona helps to build trust in the narrator as a credible storyteller.

Similarly, in presenting these views of the narrator from multiple perspectives, the author essentially bares her soul for the reader to interpret, analyze, and inevitably judge. This conscious act of exposure represents an immense gesture of trust on the author's part—trust which also contributes to the bridge the author extends to the reader as an invitation into the story and, ultimately, into her life.

A significant challenge for the memoirist with regard to credibility involves character development. It is difficult, for example, for the memoirist to credibly enter the mind of a character other than herself. Therefore in memoir, implied meaning through the objective presentation of details becomes a useful tool in developing layered characters while still remaining true to the nonfiction genre. Memoirists, in fact, must rely on the use of this technique for character development because they cannot, to any significant extent, know the unspoken thoughts of another character. And what an author of nonfiction does not know, she cannot relate to the reader without risking the credibility of her work.

One way the memoirist can describe a character's

thoughts is by repeating things that character has said in the past. Jeannette Walls executes this technique in her memoir, *The Glass Castle*. Throughout the memoir, Walls's mother freely expresses her unique thoughts on raising children. Walls writes, "She felt it was good for kids to do what they wanted because they learned a lot from their mistakes." ⁵ Because Walls is telling the story from the child's point of view, the reader naturally presumes that this assertion originated from her mother. The reader intuitively understands that a child of the narrator's age would not have the interpretive skills necessary to deduce such a claim based only on her mother's actions. Therefore, she must be repeating her mother's words.

Though Walls refrains from commenting on the long-term, or even the short-term effects of such a philosophy, the reader learns some crucial information about both the mother and the narrator in this short sentence. Not only does the reader recognize the lack of a basic protective instinct in the mother, as well as the fact that the child is left to fend for herself, but she also begins to wonder about the extent of the neglect—a curiosity which compels her to continue turning the pages of the book.

In another passage, Walls recalls and repeats in the child-like perspective of the narrator, her father's colorful language. "But he assured us that as long as he was around, we wouldn't have to defend ourselves, because, by God, anyone who so much as laid a finger on any of Rex Walls's children was going to get their butts kicked so hard that

you could read Dad's shoe size on their ass cheeks.”⁶ Such an account, told in the child's own version of her father's language, maintains the credibility of persona while adding to the depth of the father's already eccentric character.

Many authors use both detailed description and dialogue to illustrate the internal and external qualities of their main characters. Through some examples, we can see the differing effects of using only description, using only dialogue, or using a combination of both to develop characters.

When a character is presented through description of both external and internal qualities, the effect is equivalent to watching someone from afar—seeing the actions and learning about that character in a second-hand manner based on the narrator's memories. In his memoir, *Naked*, David Sedaris exemplifies this effect. He writes, “My mother had always been willing to try anything. Had there been an Eskimo restaurant, she would have been happy to crawl into the igloo and eat raw seal with her bare hands. ...”⁷ He also paints a vivid picture of his father by describing his defining characteristics. “When arguing, it was always his tactic to deny the validity of our requests. If you wanted, say, a stack of pancakes, he would tell you not that you couldn't have them but that you never really wanted them in the first place.”⁸ Though in our minds, we can see the characters go through the actions Sedaris presents, however outrageous those actions may be, and we can practically hear some version of the conversation between Sedaris and his father, we are still watching and listening from afar. We do not

yet feel like we know these characters on a personal level.

An effective descriptive technique used by Mary Karr in her memoir, *The Liar's Club* is that of revealing habitual or otherwise repeated actions of a character. She says, "Pressing mother for details of her past always led to eye-rolling and aspirin-taking and long afternoon naps." ⁹ This description not only presents a vivid picture in the reader's mind, but it also likely inspires the reader to form an opinion as to why such behavior is taking place. The mother obviously does not like to talk about her past. And her extreme reaction to any mention of it implies that something meaningful and unpleasant has likely taken place at a previous time in her life. Through this brief but poignant description, Karr piques the reader's curiosity with the implication of her mother's mysterious past.

In *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette Walls uses a combination of describing her father's actions and recalling his words. She writes, "Dad was so sure a posse of federal investigators was on our trail that he smoked his unfiltered cigarettes from the wrong end. That way, he explained, he burned up the brand name, and if the people who were tracking us looked in his ashtray, they'd find unidentifiable butts instead of Pall Malls that could be traced to him." ¹⁰ The remembered dialogue gives the reader a little more information than the description alone, helping the reader get to know this character on more of a psychological level.

When a character is presented through direct dialogue, the reader enters the character's mind, learning

about the psychology behind that character's behavior. The effect is more personal and feels more like a first-hand encounter. Sedaris, for example, illustrates his mother in this way through the sarcasm in her dialogue.

"I'm guessing you're here about the head-shaking, am I right?" she'd shout. "That's my boy, all right, no flies on him." She suggested my teachers interpret my jerking head as a nod of agreement. "That's what I do, and now I've got him washing the dishes for the next five years. I ask, he yanks his head, and it's settled. Do me a favor, though, and just don't hold him after five o'clock. I need him at home to straighten up and make the beds before his father gets home."¹¹

After hearing her speak, we can relate to this character on a more personal level. We feel like we know her just a little bit better than we did when we watched her crawl into the igloo to eat the raw seal with her bare hands.

But the picture is not complete until a character is presented through both dialogue and description. Adding a brief dialogue to the previous description of Sedaris's father changes the effect to provide the reader with both primary and secondary information and to help solidify her understanding of the character. "If you wanted, say, a stack of pancakes, he would tell you not that you couldn't have them but that you never really wanted them in the first place. 'I know what I want' was always met with 'No you don't.'"¹² The reader now has a voice to go with the picture that Sedaris has presented of his father.

For the memoirist, objectivity is almost required in the combination of description and dialogue for credible character development. This style invites the reader to participate in the action of the story and draw her own conclusions about its meaning. We can see this effect in *Naked* when Sedaris paints a particularly vivid picture of his father during their family's stay at a hotel for his sister's wedding. "What more do you want out of a hotel?' he shouted, stepping out onto the patio in his underpants." ¹³ Sedaris has married dialogue with just enough description for the reader to latch onto and finish building the character in her own mind. Here, we can see that with a little help from the reader, the character can come to life.

Mary Karr also masters this technique in her memoir *The Liar's Club*. The tenderness that the narrator's father feels for her is masterfully revealed in one short sentence after she has hidden herself in his luggage the morning he is slated to leave his family in Colorado, seemingly forever. "Get outa there, Pokey, he said, drawing the zipper down to my belly button. *God sakes, you'll break a fella's heart.*" ¹⁴

While implied meaning through the objective presentation of details seems to be intrinsic to character development in memoir, especially through the use of dialogue, it can also be applied to many other elements of craft through the metaphorical language used to illustrate not only characters but also events, settings, and abstract concepts, to the effect of helping to engage the reader in the deeper meaning of the work.

In *The Liar's Club*, Mary Karr deftly reveals her mother's character through language that can be interpreted as a direct reflection of her unstable mental state. Karr writes, "Her cheekbones winged out, and her eyes were the flawed green of cracked marbles." ¹⁵

For Jeannette Walls in *The Glass Castle*, fire represents the perils the narrator will face in her life, a life which often seems to teeter on the edge of danger. She writes,

Then he pointed to the top of the fire, where the snapping yellow flames dissolved into an invisible shimmery heat that made the desert beyond seem to waver, like a mirage. Dad told us that zone was known in physics as the boundary between turbulence and order. ¹⁶

Through this language, Walls invites the reader to make the connections between the basic states of fire and turbulence and her life as she recounts it, to the effect of engaging the reader in the interpretation of the work for its duration.

She describes the events of her childhood using the primary perspective of herself as a child growing up in the circumstances described. The understated tone reflects the child narrator's naiveté, which slowly evolves into understanding as she matures. Walls does not self-reflect, nor does she comment on how she felt about the events of her childhood. She simply tells the story in chronological order, sticking only to those events that were formative to her development.

From the beginning, the children in this family are treated like adults with parents who never allow them to believe in Santa Claus and who always put their own needs first. Walls writes,

Mom explained that since only she and Dad could fit in the front of the U-Haul, Lori, Brian, Maureen, and I were in for a treat: We got to ride in the back. It would be fun, she said, a real adventure, but there wouldn't be any light, so we would have to use all our resources to entertain one another. Plus we were not allowed to talk. Since it was illegal to ride in the back, anyone who heard us might call the cops. Mom told us the trip would be about fourteen hours if we took the highway, but we should tack on another couple of hours because we might make some scenic detours. ¹⁷

Though Walls never explains how this and other events made her feel, the reader certainly experiences emotions as a result of reading these passages. Suggestion practically screams throughout all the lines of this passage, but the true emotional catalyst lies in the word "scenic." In no way could anything be considered "scenic" from the perspective of the children who are relegated to darkness in the back of a windowless U-Haul. In the voice of child-like innocence that directly contrasts with the nature of the astounding events presented, Walls clobbers the reader over the head with the reality of the situation.

It is likely that the emotions evoked as a result of

reading such passages are of a similar nature to those which the author intended the reader to feel, if indeed, the author did intend to evoke particular emotions. But perhaps, in relaying the events without commenting, Walls wanted each reader to experience the personal emotions that naturally came as a result of reading the account—emotions that would be unique to the individual, based on her background, personality, experiences, and a host of other qualities that distinguish us, each from the other.

At one point, the narrator describes an event that occurred after her parents had spent the better part of a hot, desert afternoon in a bar while the children waited for them in the car. “Dad was driving and smoking with one hand and holding a brown bottle of beer with the other.” She continues, “Just then we took a sharp turn over some railroad tracks, the door flew open, and I tumbled out of the car.”¹⁸ Each reader will experience her own set of emotions about the fact that the father was drinking and driving, and whether or not this led to the child falling out of the car, and what it all means in the grand scheme, all of which Walls seems content to let us figure out for ourselves.

Walls’s method of understated storytelling works exceptionally well for this piece, in which embellished language or further explanation might actually distract from the raw force of the events. Walls trusts the reader to form her own conclusions about the characters and events, and she trusts that those conclusions will evoke whatever emotions the reader feels, which allow her to relate to the story

in her own way. She expertly uses reticence to evoke emotions, rarely ever commenting on her feelings even when the reader knows she must have been hurting, both emotionally and physically. This is apparent in a scene which takes place soon after the narrator enters a new school in the town to which her family has relocated. Walls writes,

I tried to get up, but all three girls started kicking me. I rolled away into a puddle, shouting for them to quit and hitting back at the feet coming at me from all sides. There was no stopping those girls until they'd had their fill. ¹⁹

In addition to events, setting provides an effective host for layered meanings implied through the language and imagery that are used to describe it. In *The Liar's Club*, for example, Mary Karr sets the scene of her hometown of Leechfield, Texas in such a way as to make the reader practically gasp for air. She writes,

The whole town sat at a semitropical latitude just spitting distance from the Gulf. It sat in a swamp, three feet below sea level at its highest point, and was crawled through by two rivers. Any hole you dug, no matter how shallow, magically filled up with brackish water. ²⁰

Here, the term “spitting distance” implies that one might actually be inclined to spit on the town. The fact that the town “sat in a swamp,” as opposed to being built on a

swamp, implies a fixed, sedentary, and generally stuck state of existence. If that wasn't enough to describe the desperate state of affairs, the town "was crawled through by two rivers." With the simple, past tense verb and passive voice, "was crawled," takes the power of action away from the town and puts it in the clutches of the two intruding rivers that are taking their slow, sweet time "crawling" through the hopeless town—a town that is clearly a victim of its own location and thereby powerless to improve its situation. The reader can't help but feel for the child narrator, whose state of existence must be reflected by the town that is practically drowning and in which she has no choice but to live.

Karr goes a step further. "I later learned that Leechfield at that time was the manufacturing site for Agent Orange, which surprised me not one bit."²¹ Somehow, the narrator retains a feeling of tenderness for the town, a feeling which the reader is inclined to believe reflects the narrator's own feelings of self-worth as a child. "It was stuff like that that'd break your heart about Leechfield, what Daddy meant when he said the town was too ugly not to love."²²

Similarly, Jeannette Walls buries the real meaning beneath her surface description of setting in *The Glass Castle* to foreshadow the impending state of her life affairs when her family moves back to her father's hometown. She writes,

Finally, we entered hill country, climbing higher and deeper into the Appalachian Mountains, stopping from time to time to let the Oldsmobile catch its breath on the steep, twisting roads. It was No-

vember. The leaves had turned brown and were falling from the trees, and a cold mist shrouded the hillsides. There were streams and creeks everywhere, instead of the irrigation ditches you saw out west, and the air felt different. It was very still, heavier and thicker, and somehow darker. For some reason, it made us all grow quiet. ²³

The immediate effect of this description of setting on the reader is a feeling of gut-sinking doom and gloom, which turns out to be a direct reflection on the world that the narrator is about to enter in the new town.

In addition to objective descriptions of setting, abstractions can serve as effective mechanisms to engage readers on a more personal level by providing concepts or ideas to which readers can assign meaning based on their own experiences. It is through this vehicle that Mary Karr reveals her most horrific revelations in *The Liar's Club*. She writes, "Real suffering has a face and a smell. It lasts in its most intense form no matter what you drape over it. And it knows your name." ²⁴ By anthropomorphizing suffering, Karr provides a mechanism by which each reader can create her own mental picture of family members, childhood bullies, strangers or other people who caused or otherwise represent suffering to her. In this way, Karr's abstraction provides a vehicle for the reader's personalization.

Throughout her memoir, Karr alternates between narrative and explanatory styles, inserting reflection where it fits and using abstract concepts to invoke emotion through

universal experiences, thereby adding another layer of meaning for the reader to ponder. “When the truth would be unbearable the mind often just blanks it out.”²⁵ Here, Karr broadens the arena for interpretation by presenting the concept of memory blocking as a basic function of the human mind. The reader can relate to Karr’s experience by associating her own experiences with this universal defense mechanism, and, in this way, can relate to Karr’s experience without having gone through the exact same set of events.

At one point, Karr writes in the second person about unfathomable episodes as if they were common events that are universally experienced by all. Though, in this case, most readers will not have experienced that which the narrator lives through, her style compels us to empathize. We empathize with this child narrator to whom such egregious injustices represent the norm.

On the night the sheriff came to our house and Mother was adjudged more or less permanently Nervous, I didn’t yet understand the word. I had only a vague tight panic in the pit of my stomach, the one you get when your parents are nowhere in sight and probably don’t even know who has a hold of you or where you’ll wind up spending the night.²⁶

In her memoir *Safekeeping*, Abigail Thomas proves to be a master of suggestion, using universal concepts about emotional growth to which many readers can re-

late on a personal level. The depth and breadth of meaning that Thomas succeeds in squeezing into so few words seems impossible. A single vignette can span decades, and the reader never feels like anything was left out. Thomas chooses just the right moments to highlight in ways that render the intended meaning unavoidable. Rather than steering clear of commenting, she dives right in to explain how she felt as a young woman versus how she feels now. She writes, “I’m remembering when the baby in my arms was my daughter, when it was all still to come. So many things did not go as I would have wished. There is so much I can’t undo.”²⁷ If the story were more narrative, this method may not be as effective, but in its current structure of vignettes that are strategically and meaningfully but not chronologically placed, the two points of view add to the complexity and depth of the work.

Writing at the heart of things, the way Thomas does in *Safekeeping*, depicts the times in life that stand out as snapshots of realization—past moments in which something substantial happened or changed. These are the moments Thomas captures, almost magically, in *Safekeeping*.

She looks out her window, uptown, at the water towers, at the squares of light in other windows. Where a man she hadn’t met back then, a man she was about to meet, a man whom she would love and hate and love again, a man with whom she would spend the next thirty years, give or take, has died.²⁸

By using simple, accessible language and brevity to

get to the heart of complex, universal themes of love and loss and emotional growth, Thomas reaches out to the core of human nature with concepts to which all people can relate.

In *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*, Dorothy Allison breaks up her memoir with brief but valuable flashes of wisdom gleaned over years of learning the hard way. She writes, “*Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is the way you can both hate and love something you are not sure you understand.*”²⁹ These abstract statements are pregnant with unspoken meaning that the reader can interpret and to which she can relate using her own mental models, knowledge, or personal experiences.

Hidden between the lines of this memoir is much more than meets the eye. While Allison writes of the horrific abuse she endured as a child, she does not describe the events as they occurred—rather, she declares them, as if to reaffirm them for herself while telling her story to the reader. “The man raped me. It’s the truth. It’s a fact. I was five, and he was eight months married to my mother.”³⁰ From there, she only alludes to the fact that the abuse was ongoing. The reader must make the connections of another, deeper story, based on Allison’s style, tone, language, allusions, and explanations.

Allison’s story is largely declarative, and as such, she explicitly states that a deeper meaning lies beneath the words on the pages of her book. In doing so, she alludes to the importance of that “silent” meaning. Allison writes,

Behind the story I tell is the one I don't. Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear. Behind my carefully buttoned collar is my nakedness, the struggle to find clean clothes, food, meaning, and money. Behind sex is rage, behind anger is love, behind this moment is silence, years of silence.³¹

Allison boldly declares the fact that significant meaning bubbles beneath the surface of her silence and, in doing so, brings to light the importance of engaging the reader by allowing her to interpret that meaning. By trusting the reader with that job, the author forges the bridge of trust and provides a mechanism by which the reader can contribute to the construction by deciphering the many layers of meaning that comprise each memoir. With readers participating in the process, the levels of meaning expand to indeterminate proportions, as each reading by each reader evokes different sets of emotions and unveils alternative emotional connections. This act of trust on the author's part elicits the trust of all readers whose hearts are filled by the silence that seeps between the lines and fills the space behind the words on the pages of every memoir.

Notes

1. Vivian Gornick, *Fierce Attachments: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 35.
2. Abigail Thomas, *Safekeeping: Some True Stories from a Life* (New York: Anchor, 2001), 64.
3. *Ibid.*, 41.
4. Jeannette Walls, *The Glass Castle: A Memoir* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 64.
5. *Ibid.*, 59.
6. *Ibid.*, 24.
7. David Sedaris, *Naked* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), 246.
8. *Ibid.*, 245.
9. Mary Karr, *The Liars' Club: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2005), 12
10. Jeannette Walls, *The Glass Castle: A Memoir* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 19.
11. David Sedaris, *Naked* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), 16.

12. Ibid., 245.
13. Ibid., 244.
14. Mary Karr, *The Liars' Club: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2005), 193.
15. Ibid., 41.
16. Jeannette Walls, *The Glass Castle: A Memoir* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 61.
17. Ibid., 48.
18. Ibid., 30.
19. Ibid., 139.
20. Mary Karr, *The Liars' Club: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2005), 23.
21. Ibid., 33,34.
22. Ibid., 34.
23. Jeannette Walls, *The Glass Castle: A Memoir* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 130.
24. Mary Karr, *The Liars' Club: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2005), 49.
25. Ibid., 9.

26. Ibid., 7.

27. Abigail Thomas, *Safekeeping: Some True Stories from a Life* (New York: Anchor, 2001), 175.

28. Ibid., 37.

29. Dorothy Allison, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (New York: Plume, 1996), 7.

30. Ibid., 39.

31. Ibid., 39.