

2018 Memoir Choices

A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah

*This is how wars are fought now: by children, hopped-up on drugs and wielding AK-47s. Children have become soldiers of choice. In the more than fifty conflicts going on worldwide, it is estimated that there are some 300,000 child soldiers. Ishmael Beah used to be one of them. What is war like through the eyes of a child soldier? How does one become a killer? How does one stop? Child soldiers have been profiled by journalists, and novelists have struggled to imagine their lives. But until now, there has not been a first-person account from someone who came through this hell and survived. In *A Long Way Gone*, Beah, now twenty-five years old, tells a riveting story: how at the age of twelve, he fled attacking rebels and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of truly terrible acts.*

Solacers by Arion Golmakani (This is difficult to find, but it can be downloaded on a Kindle)

Solacers tells the touching story of a 5-year old child's search for family life and safety following the divorce of his parents in Iran during the 1960s. The first child of a heartless father and a discarded mother is left to fend for himself on the streets of Mashhad, seeking food and shelter wherever he can. His lonely early years are an unbelievable tale of cruelty and betrayal on the part of nearly everyone who might be expected to help, save for one aunt who does her best to keep him from starving. But living a harsh and solitary existence has one advantage for this little boy: other than forcing him to be self-reliant, no one attempts to indoctrinate him on rural Iranian society's archaic cultural values and religious beliefs. And so he never accepts his wretched state as fate, choosing instead to dream big dreams about getting an education, having his own family, and starting a new life possibly in the faraway land called America. He makes a plan and by the age of 17 he boards a plane to the land of possibilities, where his dreams eventually also take flight.

***Man's Search for Meaning** by Viktor Frankl

Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's memoir has riveted generations of readers with its descriptions of life in Nazi death camps and its lessons for spiritual survival. Between 1942 and 1945 Frankl labored in four different camps, including Auschwitz, while his parents, brother, and pregnant wife perished. Based on his own experience and the experiences of those he treated in his practice, Frankl argues that we cannot avoid suffering but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose. Frankl's theory—known as logotherapy, from the Greek word logos ("meaning")—holds that our primary drive in life is not pleasure, as Freud maintained, but the discovery and pursuit of what we personally find meaningful.

*At the time of Frankl's death in 1997, *Man's Search for Meaning* had sold more than 10 million copies in twenty-four languages. A 1991 reader survey by the Library of Congress and the Book-of-the-Month Club that asked readers to name a "book that made a difference in your life" found *Man's Search for Meaning* among the ten most influential books in America*

The Unwanted: A Memoir of Childhood by Kien Nguyen

A story of hope, a story of survival, and an incredible journey of escape, The Unwanted is the only memoir by an Amerasian who stayed behind in Vietnam after the fall of Saigon and who is now living in America. Saigon fell to the Viet Cong on April 30, 1975. Kien Nguyen watched the last U.S. Army helicopter leave without him, without his brother, without his mother, without his grandparents. Left to a nightmarish existence in a violated & decimated country, Kien was more at risk than most because of his odd blond hair & his light eyes - because he was Amerasian. He was the most unwanted. Told with stark & poetic brilliance, this is a story of survival & hope, a moving & personal record of a tumultuous & important piece of history.

***I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban** by Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb

"I come from a country that was created at midnight. When I almost died it was just after midday."

When the Taliban took control of the Swat Valley in Pakistan, one girl spoke out. Malala Yousafzai refused to be silenced and fought for her right to an education. On Tuesday, October 9, 2012, when she was fifteen, she almost paid the ultimate price. She was shot in the head at point-blank range while riding the bus home from school, and few expected her to survive. Instead, Malala's miraculous recovery has taken her on an extraordinary journey from a remote valley in northern Pakistan to the halls of the United Nations in New York. At sixteen, she became a global symbol of peaceful protest and the youngest nominee ever for the Nobel Peace Prize. I AM MALALA is the remarkable tale of a family uprooted by global terrorism, of the fight for girls' education, of a father who, himself a school owner, championed and encouraged his daughter to write and attend school, and of brave parents who have a fierce love for their daughter in a society that prizes sons.

***Educated – Tara Westover**

Tara Westover was 17 the first time she set foot in a classroom. Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, she prepared for the end of the world by stockpiling home-canned peaches and sleeping with her "head-for-the-hills bag". In the summer she stewed herbs for her mother, a midwife and healer, and in the winter she salvaged in her father's junkyard. Her father forbade hospitals, so Tara never saw a doctor or nurse. Gashes and concussions, even burns from explosions, were all treated at home with herbalism. The family was so isolated from mainstream society that there was no one to ensure the children received an education and no one to intervene when one of Tara's older brothers became violent.

Then, lacking any formal education, Tara began to educate herself. She taught herself enough mathematics and grammar to be admitted to Brigham Young University, where she studied history, learning for the first time about important world events like the Holocaust and the civil rights movement. Her quest for knowledge transformed her, taking her over oceans and across continents, to Harvard and to Cambridge. Only then would she wonder if she'd traveled too far, if there was still a way home.

Educated is an account of the struggle for self-invention. It is a tale of fierce family loyalty and of the grief that comes with severing the closest of ties. With the acute insight that distinguishes all great writers, Westover has crafted a universal coming-of-age story that gets to the heart of what an education is and what it offers: the perspective to see one's life through new eyes and the will to change it.

The Distance Between Us – Reyna Grande

“In this poignant memoir about her childhood in Mexico, Reyna Grande skillfully depicts another side of the immigrant experience—the hardships and heartbreaks of the children who are left behind.” —Sonia Nazario, Pulitzer Prize winner, and author of Enrique’s Journey

Reyna Grande vividly brings to life her tumultuous early years in this “compelling . . . unvarnished, resonant” (BookPage) story of a childhood spent torn between two parents and two countries. As her parents make the dangerous trek across the Mexican border to “El Otro Lado” (The Other Side) in pursuit of the American dream, Reyna and her siblings are forced into the already overburdened household of their stern grandmother. When their mother at last returns, Reyna prepares for her own journey to “El Otro Lado” to live with the man who has haunted her imagination for years, her long-absent father.

Funny, heartbreaking, and lyrical, The Distance Between Us poignantly captures the confusion and contradictions of childhood, reminding us that the joys and sorrows we experience are imprinted on the heart forever, calling out to us of those places we first called home

*** Selections that are considered more conservative in theme, language, or violence**