

More Memoirs!

TO THE EDITOR:

I was glad to see your feature "The 50 Best Memoirs of the Past 50 Years" in the July 7 issue, and to see Vivian Gornick's "Fierce Attachments" stand beside better-known books. Great memoirs combine the strengths of storytelling, including character development, prose style and dramatic tension that make readers keep reading, with the social context, self-awareness and hard judgment calls that writing about ourselves demands.

My major disappointment is your omission of Tara Westover's "Educated," a thoughtful and beautifully crafted book that does all the things I mentioned above and more. It belongs on any list of best 50 memoirs, as I'm sure many readers agree.

DAVID A. SCOTT
COLUMBUS, OHIO

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm sure I will be only one of many to point out the omission of "Just Kids" by Patti Smith, on your list.

CONNIE REA
PHILADELPHIA

TO THE EDITOR:

The list of the 50 best memoirs of the past 50 years in yesterday's Book Review was interesting, and I was pleased to see some of my favorites — like "Country Girl," "This Boy's Life" and "Angela's Ashes" — on the list. But you missed two exceptional memoirs, both of which deserve to be on that list. "When I Was Puerto Rican" (1993), by Esmeralda Santiago, is a beautifully written, heartbreaking and inspiring story that begins with how to eat a guava in Puerto Rico and moves with Esmeralda to the bewildering world of New York City. I read it in the 1990s and I still remember parts of it. And Bruce Springsteen's brilliant "Born to Run" provides vivid pictures of growing up poor, putting a band together and making it, all in Bruce's unique voice, not that of some ghost-writer.

PAMELA ERBE
YPSILANTI, MICH.

TO THE EDITOR:

In your collection of important memoirs, I was surprised to see not a single work that was explicitly about the experience of exile, a condition that much of the world's population is experiencing today. May I suggest one of the better ones, "Feeding on Dreams: Confessions of an Unrepentant Exile," by the acclaimed Chilean, now American, writer Ariel Dorfman. In it, Dorfman recalls his years of exile during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Part memoir, part political tract and part meditation on the nature of exile, Dorfman relates a wrenching exposition of his life on the edge in exile, often in real fear for his own life, as well as its effect on his family and his ultimate decision to remain in the United States even after the fall of the dictatorship.

STEVE KOVAL
SAN CARLOS, CALIF.

TO THE EDITOR:

I am amazed that "Long Walk to Freedom," by Nelson Mandela, didn't make the cut for the top 50 memoirs. I've read many of the books on the list; none of them are as memorable to me as Mandela's description of growing up in a segregated South Africa and leading his country to a new era.

DENISE BEUSEN
EDEN PRAIRIE, MINN.

TO THE EDITOR:

I am in critical sympathy with your selection of many, if not most, of the memoirs that comprise "The 50 Best Memoirs of the Past 50 Years," as well as the difficulties of embarking on such an enterprise. That said, it is stupefying to me that Art Spiegelman's "Maus," a landmark, genre-redefining graphic memoir, without which there would be no "Fun Home" or "Persepolis," was not included on your list. Spiegelman employed a popular cultural medium — comics — to render the unassimilable experience of growing up in postwar America as a child of Holocaust survivors. Like Vivian Gornick in "Fierce Attachments," who had to create a grammar for her world so as to understand the roots of the traumas that

shaped her, Spiegelman invented a language capable of reflecting his own incongruous identity.

BELLA BRODZKI
NEW YORK

The writer is a professor of comparative literature at Sarah Lawrence College.

TO THE EDITOR:

I cast my vote for a glaring omission to the list of best memoirs: "A Drinking Life," by Pete Hamill. This best-selling memoir by the famed newspaperman, journalist, essayist and novelist is clearly deserving to be on the honor roll. Alcoholism and writers have forever been a romantic part of literary lore. The acclaimed author quit drinking cold turkey on New Year's Eve, 1972. Hamill weaves a powerful account of addiction and remarkable recovery, but unlike Poe, Hemingway, Steinbeck and Faulkner, the Brooklyn native was successful in defeating his demons. Hamill has become our modern-day O. Henry and the living embodiment of New York City.

JOHN ESPOSITO
NEW PROVIDENCE, N.J.

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm surprised that Lillian Hellman's "An Unfinished Woman" (1969) or "Scoundrel Time" (1976) was not included among the 50 best memoirs. The former contains her eloquent tribute to Dashiell Hammett, "my closest, my most beloved friend." In the latter, she recalls her encounter with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in which she agreed to testify about herself but not about others, as she wrote in her letter to the committee: "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions." Hellman may have been occasionally inaccurate, but she knew how to turn a phrase.

BERNARD F. DICK
TEANECK, N.J.

You can find more reactions to our memoirs list by visiting [nytimes.com/books](https://www.nytimes.com/books)

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