



Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home: Life on the Page

Lynn Freed

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At once a memoir of an exotic life, a meditation on the art and craft of writing, and a brilliant examination of the always complex relationship between fiction and life, Lynn Freed's critically acclaimed *Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home* surprises, instructs, and delights. With "dark and comforting wisdom" (Anne Lamott) and "great intellectual and emotional range" (Diane Johnson), Freed tears off all fictional disguises and exposes the human being behind the artist. A must-read for writers, readers, and anyone engaged in literature, *Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home* is destined to be a classic in the field of writing about writing.

Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home: Life on the Page Details

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From Reader Review Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home: Life on the Page for online ebook

Ella says

Lynn Freed is an incredibly entertaining writer. Hailing from South Africa, Freed chronicles her life from varying vantage points in these wonderfully crafted personal essays. I found her reflections on her life to be accurate, concise, and insightful, not to mention extremely relevant to my own life.

Freed has always been an energetic, loud, rambunctious woman. She tells us herself, in one of her many essays, explaining that as the youngest daughter she also took on the role of "son." Some may say that from this treatment up sprung the author, strong and resilient, dreaming of far away lands and anything but whatever was planned for her older, prettier sisters.

Freed is extremely likeable. Not likeable in the sense that she is a sweet woman (not that she isn't, I can't really speak on that subject one way or another) but in her brutal honesty. She is the one to always say what she is thinking, always do what she feels, and if it doesn't please someone else, that is their problem. I absolutely adore this outlook on life simply because it is so different from my own nature. I wish for once I could have the fire and spirit that Freed conveys in her writing, her unashamed sense of self.

These essays are a wonderful collection of separate stories that flow together almost seamlessly. They are funny, they are deep, they are a wonderful way to spend an afternoon.

Mary Wallace says

I've had Lynn Freed as a teacher and am stunned by one commenter saying her Davis students don't care for her teaching style. She is incredibly intelligent and has amazing writing and editing skills. I re-read this book a lot, along with *Writers on Writing*. I've always felt she is an incredible talent and I'd love to have her voice!

Ryan says

I like best that she re-discovered the joys of writing with pencil and paper, that it got her past the crisis of her next book, that it made the story happen. Periodically, I forget how lovely it is to write with a pen on actual paper, but something always reminds me and I enjoyed her remembering.

I also liked many of the sentences and the ideas (the two don't necessarily go together, but sometimes). The idea of leaving home, of not going back - not because you can't, but because you choose not to. That to return is failure, somehow. The idea that what we are obsessed about is often commonplace to us, it doesn't occur that we are obsessed. I loved this sentence about a vacation, but really about missing home: "I'd never been any good at Group, so I tried Sitting on Steps of Cabin with Book."

I was NOT offended by the snoring chapter - in and of itself. I am often offended by the revenge that women take upon their spouses when they are in groups together, and her telling of the story seemed outside the spirit of the book. She could have gotten rid of her husband in without humiliating him.

Overall, a tough book to stick with. Easy enough to read - and as I said, some good sentences and ideas. But I easily found the dishes and laundry captivating distractions to keep me from reading it.

Diane says

I enjoyed this book BUT with one Very Big Caveat - Under No Circumstances should you read the chapter entitled "The Big Snore" Do NOT read it - pages 117-134. It is terrible and I nearly stopped reading the book - plus the first part of the next chapter on teaching is also not very good. BUT, the rest of the book is good and very worth while. I especially liked the first and last two chapters. The book rather randomly talks about Freed's growth as a writer and a person. She has wonderful off-hand referrals to her favorite authors. She talks a lot about her relationship to her mother and how she had to get far enough away from that relationship in order to write and grow, but at the same time, had to stay connected. One of my favorite quotes: "If a way could be found for a person caught between one self and another, between one need and another, to have both at the same time, with everyone emerging happy and satisfied, well, we would be without sadness in life, without longing, without conflict, and without literature." (p 187)

Although I enjoy attending readings by authors, I never liked the audience questions and have always been very uncomfortable with the book signing process; now I will NEVER ask a question and NEVER ask to have a book signed (well, maybe John)

Thomas Cooney says

A Bible for how to write with honesty and clarity and engagement. One reads Freed's words just as they are blistering from the heat of how honestly she says what needs to be said without any prefaces or cloaking. This is not for the person who might want to write someday; this is the book for the person who has decided that the writing life is pure folly and is willing to jump in any way and suffer its many disappointments and failures and ridicules.

In addition, the prose is filled with such cadence that the voice lingers in your head long after sections are read and then re-read and re-read again.

In terms of "handbooks" it sits rightfully alongside the notebooks of Albert Camus and Flannery O'Connor's "Mystery and Manners" as THE standard by which all others must be judged.

Iva says

Having enjoyed some novels of Freed's with her view of growing up Jewish in South Africa, I expected a little more from these essays. There is a self-absorption here I couldn't get past. Though she had a career as a teacher she didn't have much to say about teaching. This collection held my interest but I just didn't warm to her at all. In one essay she mentions growing up with servants and how the word servants gets Americans upset. She didn't quite understand why there would be this reaction. My recommendation is stick to her novels.

Christie says

Although I have never read any of Lynn Freed's fiction, I was interested in her collection of essays, *Reading, Writing and Leaving Home: Life on the Page* because as a high school writing teacher I am always looking for writing advice to share with my students. You know, something like King's "If you don't time to read, you don't have the time or tools to write." While there aren't necessarily any pithy quotes in this collection, it was an interesting book because Freed herself has had an interesting life.

Born and raised in South Africa, Freed's parents were actors, and she grew up – the youngest of three girls – surrounded by books.

Most of the books in the house were kept in my parent's study, a cosy room with leather chairs, teak bookshelves, leaded windows, and piles of scripts stacked around on the floor. It was there that my mother was to be found during the day, either timing scripts or drilling a new actor. And there that I was allowed to read whatever was available – mostly plays, but also opera libretti, the odd history, a few biographies, a selection of popular novels – as long as I didn't interrupt.

Her writing career began when she wrote "ninety tedious pages" for an AFS scholarship application. The following year, when she actually landed in New York after having won the scholarship, she was told that the organization had put a two-page limit on the essay because of her entry. That story and those characters continued to swirl around in Freed's head and eventually found their way into her novel. But none of it was easy.

The world I was writing about was the same world I had tackled for AFS, but now could live it from the restraints of myth and detail and report and do with it anything I pleased. Or, at least, so I thought.

Freed writes about writing as I believe writing is: hard freakin' work. Frustrating. Painstaking. A labour of love, sure, but it'll kick your sorry ass.

...I would suggest that one should never overlook two essential elements in the development of the writer: long years of practice and a ruthless determination to succeed. Writers come to their material in different ways, but come they must if they are to succeed.

Even though this sounds like advice, *Leaving Home* isn't actually a how-to book. The book chronicles Freed's journey from girlhood to adulthood and covers everything from her relationship with her sisters to a trip back to the house she'd once called home – and all if it is fodder for her writing. If, as she claims, she has chosen truth over safety in her writing – I suspect her novels would be worth a look. I certainly enjoyed this collection of essays.

Marie says

Reflections on the relationship between fiction and actual events by a successful author and university professor who spent her childhood as part of a privileged, theatrical family in South Africa. Despite some revealing moments, the book disappoints. Freed offers up a hodgepodge of thoughts on her upbringing in

South Afric and her adult years in the United States while demonstrating little understanding of anyone beyond herself.

Nicole Harkin says

The author, Freed, hails from South Africa – and according to this memoir cum resume, that's where she places all of her novels. Before my professor recommended the memoir, I had never heard of Freed. Also, according to this book Freed has lived her life on her own terms – which we hear over and over. She relied and continues to rely largely on her innate "talent" as a writer to get by after she divorced her husband. Lucky for her, since she tells the reader over and over how hard it is to read all of the poor writing found in the MFA courses she teaches to make ends meet. She also tell us she has problems not being brutally honest – yet she can't bare to tell these mediocre writers the truth: they have no future.

Is that true? Is there really no future for the average or even poor writer? Brent and I recently came upon some dastardly lawyer-ing. A large part of being a good lawyer is anticipating the worst case scenario. This poor work made me realize there are lots of professionals out there who make a living not being the best. Freed puts so much emphasis on being the best writer. I would love to do some statistically analysis of her former students and see how they are all doing. Were they really that bad?

Freed does make some great points about writing though—one of which being that the writer must stay away from the cliché of making all parts of a book fall into a "good" or "bad" basket. In fact, because I remembered this idea from her book, I just edited myself and instead of telling you that I thought she should have cut all of the family crap from her book, I realized that some of it was quite interesting, and therefore, resides in the gray of life.

Seeking out the gray is akin to seeking truth in your writing – another theme of the book. Writing the truth is hard. When I try I sometimes get worried that I will hurt people's feelings – or worse yet my truth – which has a tendency to modify a bit to sometimes enhance the truth- might be completely different from someone else's truth. But what can you do? Press on as Linda would have said to me.

The final tidbit that struck me was her guidance to "Ask your self what obsesses you and write about that."

Annoyingly, one long-term obsession of mine –gigantic waves—just got its book, so I would add to the tip: NOW. Go write about your obsession now.

Josephine Ensign says

Ages ago I enjoyed reading Freed's first two major books *Home Ground* and *Bungalow*. I expected to enjoy reading her more recent memoir (of sorts) but was disappointed. This book is really more a collection of linked personal essays. I did like the essay/chapter "Taming the Gorgon" about mother-daughter relationships. But overall the book came across to me as overly sharp, bitter, peevish, and more than a bit spoiled-brattish. She complains loudly about having to endure teaching aspiring (and mostly talentless in her estimation) writers in MFA programs in various locations around the U.S. And then she keeps coming back to describing the glorious surroundings of her all-expenses paid writing retreat at Bellagio on Lake Como. I threw the book across the room.

jordan says

Vladimir Nabakov famously once observed "there is only one school of literature - talent." True or not, writer Lynn Freed shares the great man's sentiment in her beautiful, clever, if occasionally brutal memoir and mediation on the art of writing. Freed, the writer of several very fine novels, but one whose acid pen and command of the art of brevity marks her above all as an author of excellent short stories, here examines her life. From growing up in South Africa, the burden of growing up as the plain daughter (unimaginable as whether in photos or in person the woman oozes charm and sensuality) of a pair of actors, her first failed marriage, her struggles as a writer, and her thoughts on the crafts.

Would be writers hoping to tap into her genius through this book will doubtless be surely disappointed. Though a Professor in an MFA program, Freed remains at best suspicious of the notion that one can be taught to be a great writer. That said, she offers a thoughtful guide to what makes for poor writing with observations about the dangers of nostalgia and hollow images. Readers of Freed's supple sparse short stories with their perfectly chosen words will take heart to learn exactly how much she agonized in her efforts to produce her artful characters that leap from the page.

On occasion Freed falls backwards, especially when she is considering the work of other authors. Though her pleas that the first requirement of the writer is to read, her observations arrive flat when dealing with specific authors, even as her obvious love of the written word shines through.

Readers unfamiliar with Freed would do well to begin their experience of her work elsewhere, I would recommend the sharp gripping collection "The Curse of the Appropriate Man." Yet for fans of Freed like me, who savor her stories and novels as if each were perfectly crafted wines that one can imbibe over and over again, "Reading, Writing, and Leaving Home" comes as a great gift.

Yulia says

From what I've heard of Lynn Freed's teaching manner at UC-Davis, I'm not surprised she's not popular there and often comes across as crotchety with and unsupportive of her students. She says as much in this book. But what makes her a bad teacher makes her an enjoyable writer: because she's not afraid to say things that paint her in a bad light. Is this courage? A fuck-off to strangers? A sign of her crotchety nature? All of the above? No, I don't want her as a mentor, but hey, writers shouldn't have to be mentors to make a living.

Amy Kitchell-Leighty says

This is a nice little book by Lynn Freed in which I got to listen to her lecture from part of this book at Bennington last week. It's funny and charming as was her lecture. This is a book that all aspiring writers should skim through and I say "skim through" because it's a quick read and one that you could turn to any page and not be lost. Through this memoir Freed gives advice to the reader on the craft of writing and the relationship between life and fiction. I like the photos that start each chapter and of course the quaint cover.

Bookmarks Magazine says

In the risky genre of writing about writing, Freed has emerged with a finely crafted and revelatory work—and with an honesty that bludgeons. In her essays (first published in various magazines and newspapers), she bemoans that writing cannot be taught and that in her role as a teacher, "the job is turning me into a dancing ape." Whatever goes on in her classroom doesn't matter: she teaches us now with her essays. And what she teaches is that writing is wholly demanding and that mere intention is insufficient. But when the demand is met, we get work something like Freed's—transforming, enigmatic, and painful in its brutal honesty.

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Patricia Murphy says

Okay. I've read nearly 100 memoirs. This is one where it's not so much I dislike the writing, but I dislike the author. It was very difficult to tolerate her supercilious attitude about teaching, and reading the chapter on snoring was like watching someone beat someone else up on the playground.
