

JUST PUBLISHED

ANDREW BRIDGE '84  
*Hope's Boy*  
(Hyperion, 2008)



In his compelling and frank memoir that became a *New York Times* best-seller, Bridge recounts his traumatic experiences living 11 years in foster care. The author was placed in foster care at age 7 when his mother, “Hope,” was institutionalized. After surviving one of America’s most notorious children’s facilities, MacLaren Hall in Los Angeles, he lived with a loveless foster family that refused to accept him as one of their own. Bridge immersed himself in his academics, relied on the kindness of teachers, and refused to surrender the love he held for his mother. He went on to earn a scholarship to Wesleyan, attended Harvard Law School, and became a Fulbright Scholar. Today Bridge remains dedicated to helping children living in poverty and in the foster care system.

REBECCA S. MILLER '94  
*Carriacou String Band Serenade*  
(Wesleyan University Press, 2008)



Each year on a weekend before Christmas, the small Caribbean island of Carriacou, Grenada, holds its Parang Festival, featuring concerts, performances of local quadrille dance, a cappella singing competitions, and a climactic string band competition. Miller examines the varying impact that factors such as cultural ambivalence, globalization, and technology have had on the performance of Carriacou’s folk and traditional music and dance forms. She draws upon historical sources and hundreds of interviews with local musicians, civic leaders, and others. She considers how the enduring significance of the Parang Festival pays homage to the social and political history of Carriacou as the local culture adjusts to modernization. An accomplished traditional fiddle player, Miller has played Carriacou string band music and provides a unique perspective on her subject matter.

MICHAEL PALMER '64  
*The First Patient*  
(Saint Martin's Press, 2008)



In his latest thriller, Palmer weaves a suspenseful tale about presidential politics, cutting-edge medicine, and nanotechnology. His page-turner centers around Gabe Singleton, a small-town doctor, and Andrew Stoddard, who were both friends and roommates at the Naval Academy in Annapolis years ago. Andrew becomes a war hero and eventually president of the United States. When his physician mysteriously disappears, he asks Gabe to take over the vacant position. After Gabe reluctantly agrees, he discovers that his friend may be going insane but perhaps not by natural causes. Palmer succeeds in keeping the reader on edge as Gabe must figure out how on to proceed while his friend’s life is in jeopardy and the world’s safety may be in danger. Palmer employs fascinating medical details to tell his story, and he consulted a former physician who worked at the White House to help create a convincing political setting.

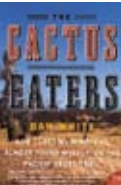
MARY ROACH '81  
*Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex*  
(Saint Martin's Press, 2008)



Having fearlessly confronted cadavers and the afterlife in her previous books, Roach now takes on the world of sex research with her usual sense of the absurd and her flair for capturing stranger-than-fiction stories. She travels the globe to investigate historical pioneers who studied sex and to talk to contemporary experts, taking us behind the scenes of MRI centers, labs, bedrooms, the Center for Sex and Culture in San Francisco, and a pig farm in Denmark. Besides discussing such well-known figures as Masters and Johnson, Alfred Kinsey, and Leonardo da Vinci, she also introduces the reader to several other fascinating subjects, including amateur physiologist Princess Marie Bonaparte, great-grandniece to Napoleon, who had her clitoris surgically relocated in hopes of achieving sexual satisfaction; Dr. Geng-Long Hsu, a Taiwanese expert on erectile dysfunction;

and Dr. Ahmed Shafik, based in Cairo, who tested the effects of polyester underpants on the sexual activity of rats. Roche’s work is an entertaining tribute to those who bravely work in a field that many still consider taboo.

DAN WHITE '89  
*The Cactus Eaters: How I Lost My Mind—and Almost Found Myself—on the Pacific Crest Trail*  
(Harper Perennial, 2008)



In his well-written and often funny travelogue, White records what happens when he and his girlfriend, Allison, two inexperienced hikers, attempt to walk the challenging Pacific Crest Trail, a 3-to-10-feet wide, 2,650-mile-long route running from Mexico to Canada, through varied landscapes of grueling desert, tick-infested lowlands, seven national parks, snowcapped mountain passes, and bear country. White skillfully captures the highs and lows of their journey into the wilderness as the couple faces a number of trials that test their sanity and their relationship. They meet a number of memorable characters along the way. White is an amiable storyteller and travel companion as he recounts the misadventures of his trip with good humor.

— David Low

For additional book reviews, listings, and news, please see: [wesleyan.edu/magazine/](http://wesleyan.edu/magazine/) or [wesleyan.edu/magazine/extra/](http://wesleyan.edu/magazine/extra/).

If you are a Wesleyan graduate, faculty member, or parent with a new publication, please let us know by contacting David Low '76 at [dlow@wesleyan.edu](mailto:dlow@wesleyan.edu) or at Wesleyan magazine, Office of Public Affairs, Wesleyan University, South College, Middletown, CT 06459.

OF NOTE

Interior designer Tracey Pruzan '85 is co-author with Elissa Cullman of *Decorating Master Class: The Cullman & Kravis Way* (Abrams, 2008), which demystifies the decorating process and shares the basic principles followed by one of New York City’s top decorating firms, Cullman & Kravis. The book answers frequently asked questions and solves problems associated with various projects, offering case studies of actual designs.

FICTION

- Sue Guiney '77, *Tangled Roots* (Bluechrome, 2008)
- Alan Madison '81, *100 Days and 99 Nights* (Little Brown, 2008)
- Robert Runk '67 (aka Bobby Rusher), *How to Line Up Your Fourth Putt* (Doubleday, 2007)
- Manya Tessler '98, *Yuki's Ride Home* (Bloomsbury USA Children's Books, 2008)

NONFICTION

- Charles Barber '85, *Comfortably Numb: How Psychiatry Is Medicating a Nation* (Pantheon, 2008)
- Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley '92, *Tears of Iron: Cultural Responses to Famine in Nineteenth-Century China* (University of California Press, 2008)
- Jay Geller '75, *On Freud's Jewish Body: Mitigating Circumcisions* (Fordham University Press, 2007)
- Debra Haffner '76, *What Every 21st-Century Parent Needs to Know* (Newmarket Press, 2008)
- Sam Han '06, *Navigating Technomedia: Caught in the Web* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008)
- Jeffrey McCarthy '89, *Contact: Mountain Climbing and Environmental Thinking* (University of Nevada Press, 2008)

FACULTY

- Gina A. Ulysse, associate professor of anthropology and African American studies, *Downtown Ladies: Informal Commercial Importers, A Haitian Anthropologist, and Self-Making in Jamaica* (University of Chicago Press, 2007)
- Vera Schwarcz, Mansfield Freeman Professor of History and East Asian Studies, *Place and Memory in the Singing Crane Garden* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)

# BETWEEN THE LINES

## Writing to Affirm Life

Laura M. Flynn '89 discusses the difficulties she faced while writing *Swallow the Ocean* (Counterpoint Press, 2008), her heartbreaking memoir about her mother's mental illness.

Though I always knew I would write, it was not until my mid-thirties that I considered writing about my childhood. This story felt too dark, too personal, and due to my mother's unimproved condition over the last 30 years, too bleak for me or potential readers to face.

A door cracked open when, after returning from living overseas for five years, I set aside three months to write. I'd planned to write about my experiences in Haiti, where I'd been living, but found memories of childhood crowding in. I was drawn to the doll games my sisters and I played as children. During the years from age eight to eleven, when I'd lived with my mother while my father struggled to gain custody of my sisters and me, my mother frequently would not let us leave the house. We played for eight or ten hours at a stretch, sending our Madame Alexander dolls across the prairie, on shipboard voyages, and finally into magical realms, diving under the ocean, where they breathed water, rode sea horses, and filled the hems of their skirts with sand to keep them from floating back to the surface.

Just as these games had allowed some light and beauty into our chaotic home when I was a child, they worked on my adult imagination in the same way. I saw my childhood in a more nuanced way. There was love and beauty here, a powerful story of sibling solidarity, and the self-preserving work of imagination.

The more I wrote, the more magic I found. My earliest memories—from the time before my mother was ill—were filled with the stories and games she shared with us. She was a charismatic, intelligent woman, fully immersed in the vibrant world around her, the San Francisco of the 1960s and '70s. Her illness, which came on fully by the time I was six or seven, robbed us of that person. She'd spent the past 30 years locked in her own mind, slipping deeper into isolation, so there is little to show for her life. I wrote this book to mark her life.

Of course there was a danger of romanticizing—the past, my mother, or worst of all, mental illness. In the end there was nothing charming or poetic about my mother's illness. For my family, schizophrenia has been more like a funeral that never ends. This, too, I wanted to record, honestly. I wanted to look the tragedy of my mother's life directly in the eye without flinching.

In doing so, I had to grapple with my own ambivalence towards medical materialism. I understood, indeed I affirm, that my mother suffers from a disease of organic nature. But anyone who has intimate contact with someone suffering with schizophrenia has questions that neither biology nor psychiatry, and certainly not our failing mental health care system, can answer. I'd always felt a powerful identification with my mother—I wanted to know, I wanted readers to know, not the symptoms or the diagnosis, but what it felt like to be her. To include her perspective as nearly as I could, I relied on memories, research, firsthand accounts of other people who have experienced psychosis, and finally on the leap of imagination that only literature allows—the emphatic step into another person's experience.

When I began writing *Swallow the Ocean*, I thought it would take me six months; it took six years. Along the way I held various jobs, moved across country, completed an MFA in creative writing, and met and married my husband. Always, the writing was the organizing principle in my life. At times the book felt stagnant for months. Looking back I see this was due in part to my own slow-lifting resistance. Much as I liked to believe I was at peace with my past, writing put me to a test. One thing I learned is that it is not possible to write from shame. We can write from anger, sorrow, love, even guilt, but shame will not be written. Or perhaps it's that shame dissolves in the ink. However it works, in the end there is this unexpected boon, an ability to say without wavering on paper and then in public, Yes, this is my life.

I don't regret the years. Writing this book, I taught myself to write, learned the tools, the craft, and the discipline (which, I sadly must report, has to be relearned every day). I am working now on the book I originally intended to write—about Haiti. I am in no rush. I now understand that, for me at least, to write towards anything approaching the complexity of human experience takes a steady accretion of detail and image, of language and insight, and the slow-moving alchemy of memory and imagination which only time can provide.

**Laura Flynn teaches writing in Minneapolis at the University of Minnesota and at the Loft Literary Center. She has been an activist and human rights advocate all her adult life, and is the editor of *Eyes of the Heart: Seeking a Path for the Poor in the Age of Globalization* by Jean-Bertrand Aristide.**

