



Crash Course: Essays From Where Writing and Life Collide

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Robin Black's path through loss and survival delivered her to the writer's life. Agoraphobia, the challenges of parenting a child with special needs, and the legacy of a formidable father all shaped that journey. In these deeply personal and instructive essays, the author of the internationally acclaimed *If I loved you, I would tell you this* and *Life Drawing* explores the making of art through the experiences of building a life. Engaging, challenging, and moving, *Crash Course* is full of insight into how to write—and why.

From "Autumn, 1972, A Moment at Which I Became a Writer":

I sense, even now, the reverberations of a kind of shattering of my foundation and a quick rebuild, a change at a molecular level of who I understood myself to be. No longer someone who could look at another person without wondering what their life was like, but someone with a new curiosity about what people's stories might actually be.

Robin Black is the author of the story collection, *If I loved you, I would tell you this* and the novel *Life Drawing*, both critically acclaimed, and both published in multiple languages. She has developed a loyal, enthusiastic following for her essays on life and writing, online and in such publications as the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *O Magazine*. She lives with her husband in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where the house is always open for their three grown children.

Crash Course: Essays From Where Writing and Life Collide Details

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Catherine McKenzie says

Robin Black wrote a beautiful novel called Life Drawing which I highly recommend to anyone. This book of essays is an interesting companion piece to that - the background on how it got written, the aftermath of having written it, and her observations on life and writing in general. For both writers and those interested in writers, I highly recommend it.

Amy says

I loved Robin Black's novel Life Drawing, and reading this book of short essays was like having an intimate conversation about the writing life with a writer I greatly admire. While these essays contain a lot of writing advice, this is less a "how to" writing manual than a personal exploration of Black's growth and development as a writer, struggling also at times to balance personal and family challenges with her career. These essays are honest and sometimes raw, infused with wisdom and often humor. Recommended, especially for writers and those interested in the writing life.

Celeste Ng says

I wasn't more than two pages into Crash Course when I pulled out a pen and started underlining like crazy. In these essays, Robin Black is simultaneously a wise teacher, an encouraging mentor, and that friend who gives you the real dirt on what the writing life is like. Crash Course is an invaluable resource and reassurance for any writer.

Sally Koslow says

Lucky me: I landed an advance copy of Robin Black's CRASH COURSE: Essays from Where Writing and Life Collide. From the pov of both delighted reader and instructor who helps students polish their essays, this book is a valuable tool. Black writes with honesty matched by good humor. Consider "I've just started to realize how bloody difficult it is, even when you like a book a lot, to find things to say that don't sound like you bought them at the blurb store." and "I am empty now.... Some might call this writers block, but I have always disliked that term--and not only because I don't know where to put the apostrophe." I would love to take classes with Black, who teaches in an MFA program. This book is the next best thing.

Tammy Matthews says

This is a wonderfully written collection of thoughts on writing, and I had a lot to take away from it, judging by the number of dog-eared pages and underlines I'd made by the end.

Eva Stachniak says

Robin Black is an inspiration. This poignant and evocative collection of essays on writing and motherhood is a book to pick up when you need a guide through the muddles of writing and/or life.

Leslie Lindsay says

Oh my goodness. This book. Every writer, would-be-writer, aspiring writer, closet-writer, bestselling and debut writer **needs** this book. Trust me. It's like Robin Black crawled inside my head and accessed every single thought I've had about motherhood, the writing life, and the life in writing. It makes me want to be a better writer. And that, right there, is hugely powerful.

CRASH COURSE is an insightful, beautiful, and searingly honest account of the writing life told with wisdom, humor, and self-awareness you'd be hard-pressed to find anywhere else. It's fantastic. I laughed, nodded in agreement, gasped, and maybe, quite possibly could have shed a tear or two.

Black **gets** it. She lives it and then she lives it some more.

Do yourself a favor, get this book. Now.

For all of my reviews, including author interviews, please see: www.leslielindsay.com

Nancy LiPetri says

A must-read for everyone who has been published and especially for those who hope to make a career and living from writing books, Black shares what it's like to be a professional author with all a writer's idiosyncrasies and paranoias magnified. She tempers it with sane perspective, priceless wisdom for maintaining at least partial sanity. One of my favorite takeaways was from a chapter on rejection: do whatever you have to do, avoid whatever you need to avoid...write, send the work out, write more...

Ellie says

I felt sad when I realized I was nearing the end of these lovely essays. For the time I spent reading them, I was in the company of someone warm, intelligent, understanding, funny. Someone I felt was a friend, even though we'd never met and were unlikely ever to do so.

Robin Black stalled in her writing career for 20 years. She raised a family, including a daughter with special needs and she shares some of the challenges and joys of her life then. She has ADD and she also shares some of the challenges she faces. She talks about the gift of finally writing, of overcoming whatever (and she has some clear ideas) stopped her from doing so for all those years.

She also writes of the pain she was in all those years as an artist who was not creating, a writer who didn't write and of the ways it poisoned a life that in many ways she loved. She loved being a stay-at-home mother and her second husband. But the not-writing poisoned the well-spring of her life and so while she celebrates her second act, she honors the pain of all those other years.

Many of these essays also address the writing life, the process of writing and what it means (to her) to be a writer. I found her writing about writing to be particularly interesting. She's a teacher of writing as well as a writer and my sense from these essays is she's a teacher with whom I'd love to study.

I did find her just a little privileged: part of me felt that her pain was that of someone who had been given many material as well as emotional gifts and although her struggle was real and difficult, I envied her the ability to take the time (and money?) to get her MFA at Warren Wilson and devote herself to writing without also juggling another job as well as her family. But as I said this quibble comes out of my own envy. She has had her pains and problems--as have we all.

However, apart from that relatively small resentment, I loved being in her writer's presence. The personal she has on the page is compassionate, intelligent, interested in the world. I immediately bought her novel, *Life Drawing*. If it's half as well-written and interesting as these essays, it should be a rewarding experience to read.

Lee Ann Dalton says

Robin Black is the writer mentor and friend who gives you hope and kicks your butt into gear all in one go. Fabulous book, one to read often as a refresher.

Jim Minick says

Many great lines of advice, like "tough skin for career, tender skin for art."
Or the essay on adverbs made me rethink this much-maligned word.

Caroline Igra says

This is a gem of a book. Black's writing is absolutely pitch perfect, so incredibly readable and enjoyable. She uses stories from her own life to elucidate the writing process with all its pitfalls and joys. It's a very personal book while simultaneously a universal guide to anyone serious about writing.
I loved it. Pass it on.

Erin says

I love Robin Black's essays on writing, and was really excited when I found out this collection was

forthcoming. It didn't disappoint.

To my mind, calling Crash Course a "motherhood and writing book" is inaccurate. As a whole, the essays continually push back and forth across the "ought to" and "have to" territories in a writer's life -- something that many writers contend with on a nearly minute-by-minute basis, but don't talk about -- or think about -- beyond self-chastising. Black doesn't so much offer solutions as she says well, here's what's happened. As someone who is weary of writing advice books but still needs that sort of outside influence sometimes? I **really** appreciate that approach.

Linda says

Enjoyed this book. Robin Black read some of her fiction at my MFA program at Ashland this summer, and then I found her writing memoir. She touches on many topics in a series of short essays, several of which I bookmarked to read to my classes. She's engaging; it's a quick read because of short sections on many topics, and I loved her defense of adverbs!

Bill says

Sharp, insightful essays about writing and life.
