



The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life

By Amy Tan

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Delve into the stories from Amy Tan's life that inspired bestselling novels like *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Valley of Amazement*

Amy Tan has touched millions of readers with haunting and sympathetic novels of cultural complexity and profound empathy. With the same spirit and humor that characterize her acclaimed novels, she now shares her insight into her own life and how she escaped the curses of her past to make a future of her own. She takes us on a journey from her childhood of tragedy and comedy to the present day and her arrival as one of the world's best-loved novelists. Whether recalling arguments with her mother in suburban California or introducing us to the ghosts that inhabit her computer, *The Opposite of Fate* offers vivid portraits of choices, attitudes, charms, and luck in action--a refreshing antidote to the world-weariness and uncertainties we all face today.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amy Tan begins *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*, a collection of essays that spans her literary career, on a humorous note; she is troubled that her life and novels have become the subject of a "Cliff's Notes" abridgement. Reading the little yellow booklet, she discovers that her work is seen as complex and rich with symbolism. However, Tan assures her readers that she has no lofty, literary intentions in writing her novels--she writes for herself, and insists that the recurring patterns and themes that critics find in them are entirely their own making. This self-deprecating stance, coupled with Tan's own clarification of her intentions, makes *The Opposite of Fate* feel like an extended, private conversation with the author.

Tan manages to find grace and frequent comedy in her sometimes painful life, and she takes great pleasure in being a celebrity. "Midlife Confidential" brings readers on tour with Tan and the rest of the leather-clad writers' rock band, the Rock-Bottom Remainders. And "Angst and the Second Book" is a brutally honest, frequently hysterical reflection on Tan's self-conscious attempts to follow the success of *The Joy Luck Club*.

In a collection so diverse and spanning such a long period of time, inevitably some of the pieces feel dated or repetitious. Yet, Tan comes off as a remarkably humble and sane woman, and the book works well both to fill in her biography and to clarify the boundaries between her life and her fiction. In her final, title essay, Tan juxtaposes her personal struggles against a persistent disease with the nation's struggles against terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11. She declares her transformative, artistic power over tragedy, reflecting: "As a storyteller, I know that if I don't like the ending, I can write a better one." --Patrick O'Kelley

From Publishers Weekly

Tan's bestselling works of fiction are, in part, based on her own family history, and this robust book, her first nonfiction effort, explains much about where those stories came from and how they influenced her. The collection of "casual pieces" (previously published in such diverse venues as Harper's Bazaar, Ski Magazine, the New Yorker, Salon.com and even PW) covers Tan's childhood in California and Switzerland; her writing career; her relationships with her mother and her late editor, Faith Sale; and, most significantly, the role of fate in her life. Raised with "two pillars of beliefs" (Christian faith on her father's side; Chinese fate on her mother's), Tan finds luck both good and bad in all corners of her life. Ultimately, however, she knows "a higher power knows the next move and... we are at the mercy of that force." As she reflects on how things have happened in her 50-odd years, Tan's writing varies from poetic to prosaic. In an excerpt from a journal she kept during a 1990 trip to China, she eloquently describes Shanghai's streets: "Gray pants and white shirts are suspended from long bamboo poles that overhang the street. The laundry flaps in the wind like proletarian banners." But reading about Tan's adventures with her rock band, the Rock Bottom Remainders, feels a bit like reading someone else's high school yearbook's inside jokes, as she reminisces about truck-stop breakfasts and late-night sing-alongs. Still, this is a powerful collection that should enthrall readers of *The Joy Luck Club* and Tan's other novels. B&W photos.

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From [Booklist](#)

Tan's readers are well versed in the basic elements of her mother's difficult life and demanding personality because her mother and her tragic family history have inspired a great deal of Tan's spellbinding fiction. Now in her first nonfiction book, Tan steps out from behind the veil of imaginative writing and presents a collection of arresting autobiographical essays that elicit a rich spectrum of responses from astonishment to shock, laughter, sympathy, and admiration. Tan tells the incredibly poignant tale of her parents' unlikely

marriage, the stark anguish of losing both her father and brother within a year, and her restless mother's peripatetic ways, which caused Tan and her brothers to change schools innumerable times until they landed in Switzerland, where Tan netted the classic bad-boy boyfriend. Questions of memory, intuition, language, inheritance, and storytelling preoccupy Tan as she traces the serpentine path that led her to become a novelist, and recounts her mother's struggle with depression and Alzheimer's. Tan is mischievously hilarious in her reports on the writing life, and intensely moving in the most mysterious and haunting of her musings, her remembrances of the murder of her closest friend and the strange, prescient visions that preceded and followed this tragedy. No matter how much readers already revere Tan, their appreciation for her will grow tenfold after experiencing these provocative and unforgettable revelations. *Donna Seaman*

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