



# Before We Get Started: A Practical Memoir of the Writer's Life

*Bret Lott*

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## **Before We Get Started: A Practical Memoir of the Writer's Life** Bret Lott

This marvelous guide begins where other books on writing and the writing life leave off. Delving deep into the creative process, Bret Lott reveals truths we scarcely realized we needed to know but without which we as writers will soon lose our way. In ten intimate essays based on his own experiences and on the seasoned wisdom of writers including Eudora Welty, E. B. White, Henry David Thoreau, Henry James, and John Gardner, Lott explores such topics as

- why write? why keep writing?
- the importance of simple words
- the finer points of character detail
- narrative and the passage of time
- the pitfalls of technique
- making a plan—and letting it go
- risking failure—and reaping the benefits
- Accepting rejection

Writers travel alone, but Bret Lott's book makes the journey less lonely and infinitely more rewarding. Before We Get Started will help you make your work as good as it can be: "Pay attention recklessly. Strain to see through the window of your own artistic consciousness in the exhilarating knowledge that there is no path to the waterfall, and there are a million paths to the waterfall, and there is, too, only one path: yours."

## **Before We Get Started: A Practical Memoir of the Writer's Life Details**

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# From Reader Review Before We Get Started: A Practical Memoir of the Writer's Life for online ebook

## Karly Noelle Noelle says

Not having read any of Lott's fiction, the sensitivity, awareness, and intelligence with which he writes in this book already piques my interest. While I would say this book isn't as essential a book for writers as say, Stephen King's *On Writing* or Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, there is much power and wisdom in this collection of essays, and plenty of encouragement. I particularly appreciated his emphasis on finding the "why" of writing, which can't be simply a desire to see one's name at the top of an article or on the bestseller list, and of how the life of being a "famous writer" is often without much glamor or markers of success. While I don't feel I gained much from his rambling essays on technique and irony, the final two essays in the book, "The Most Fragile Book" and "Toward Humility" are as beautiful and insightful as anything I've ever read.

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## lee lee says

One of the best books I've read "about writing," because Lott is honest from the start--he doesn't know anything; he can't teach anything; we can't know anything. That isn't what writing is about. There are some great quotes, most of which are him quoting someone else. If I owned the copy I was reading, I definitely would've had to grab a pencil. Would read this again in a heartbeat!

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## Cody Cunningham says

I really enjoyed this one because it's not your typical book on writing. Lott doesn't focus on technique; he shares practical wisdom on the author's mindset. I would certainly recommend this one to any who desire to write.

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## alex wesley moore says

In a world of publishing ego and literary theory, how many writers still dare to write about the heart with such openness and honesty? Thank you.

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## Lindsey says

It's interesting to "peek in" a writer's life and have him talk about the ups and downs of the writing life. To hear that is encouraging. His chapter about real characters in stories was excellent ("Work": give your character a job to do). I may assign that to my students in the future. Some of the essays are uneven. I found myself skipping through a couple of them because I was bored. Maybe that's inevitable in a book of essays. All-in-all, though, this is a nice book of essays reflecting on a writer's life from a guy who has a lot of advice

to offer but is humble about it.

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### **Meggie says**

Lott's "practical memoir of the writer's life" is a beautiful anthology of Lott's reflections on writing. I was assigned this book for my writing class, and I'm glad it was! Topics range from rejection, defining creative non-fiction and technique (or non-technique). He also has a beautiful, humble piece on his lurch to fame when his novel, *Jewel* was selected for Oprah's book club.

Lott writes from a place of Christian faith, and sprinkles that faith in appropriately. I enjoyed reading a Christian writer whose faith is clearly his center, but doesn't over-emphasize or trivialize his faith. Its another reminder that a Christian writer need not write just Christian fiction or theological reflections.

Overall, his narrative style and voice is a delight to read and was an encouragement to keep writing. Whether you're a writer or not, I'd recommend this book as a reflection life itself.

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### **Hannah Comerford says**

I adore Lott's writing because it feels personal and humble. I feel like he can relate to me, a writer in an MFA program who hasn't published yet. This isn't a book about technique and specific craft elements, but it's a book to encourage and inspire you as a writer.

If nothing else, read it for the final essay, "Toward Humility," which is one of my favorite essays of all time.

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### **Alissa Wilkinson says**

This is somehow precisely and exactly what I need to be reading right now. I think I will be reading it over again often.

I have read (many) books on writing, most of which I find poetic but not terribly useful, but this will be on the top of my list, with Stephen King's "On Writing."

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### **Ela says**

*"Of course the stuff we want to write about in the novel and in the short story involves matters of the heart, matters of life and death, matters of consequence and weight and measure. Matters that we all as writers and, more importantly, as human beings believe are worthy of our attentions and ruminations precisely because we are human beings."*

Finally. I am done with reading this book. The first time I saw this from Manila International Book Fair's

selections, I let it pass through the cash register (random fact: alongside purchasing Paolo Coelho's *Witch of Portobello*). After almost two years, here I am, writing this "review". I imagine Brett Lott here being the creative nonfiction teacher that he is, to me, his unknown student, feeling the feels this book has to offer to anonymous people (like me) who finds outlet in writing their hearts out, even without the presence of another soul.

In the following passage, this is how I shall put my writing style: I typed. I simply began writing. It's just that now, I needed more of doing this: *"Pay attention recklessly."*

*"Any definition of true worth to you as a writer will and must come to you experientially."*

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### **Jgknobler says**

This book has very little practical content and much of it is written with a kind of gracelessness and lack of charm. The last chapter, however, written in the second person and about an unsuccessful and ludicrous book-signing, witnessed by the author's young son, is a gem.

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### **Charlie says**

Intimate, inspiring, and fun to read. Even the cranky anti-irony essay was charming.

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### **Thomas says**

WOW! The two essay chapters titled "Why Write, Anyway?" and "Toward a Definition of Creative Nonfiction" are worth the price of the entire book. He's used many other writers to clarify these issues and has thrown his own light onto the giants that came before. WOW! I could not put it down and actually took notes the third time through!

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### **Elizabeth Moore says**

The chapter on rejection made the whole book worth it for me. Also, the last chapter is one of the truest, most transparent pieces of writing I've ever read. Thank you, Bret, for admitting to not knowing anything. Because, same.

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### **Julie says**

Highly recommended for all writers. Lott is refreshingly humble. This book would be a great companion, especially during periods of self doubt (so always, I guess). If I ever taught a creative course, I'd have students read "A Home, A House: On Writing and Rejection." They probably wouldn't like it or believe it (I wouldn't when I was younger) but it'd be good advice for students to have in the back of their brain when

they finally did "get it."

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## **Catherine Gillespie says**

As a successful author (with one of his books selected by Oprah for her book club) who also teaches in MFA programs, and as a Christian who does not write in the Christian publishing industry, Lott has a perspective on writing that shares similarities with other books on craft and vision, but also brings a refreshingly different twist on familiar topics.

Lott examines long fiction, short stories, and narrative non-fiction to get at the root of what each genre is and why and how we write it. Further, he explores how our understanding of fundamental principles informs our writing even—and especially—when we are simply writing honest stories.

The book is practical--with an especially strong section on creative non-fiction--but also strikes a good balance with the philosophy of why we write. Lott's theory/vision sections get to the root of the practical aspects, including how to get out of the way of our writing.

{Read more on A Spirited Mind about this book and Lott's other book on writing/memoir}

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