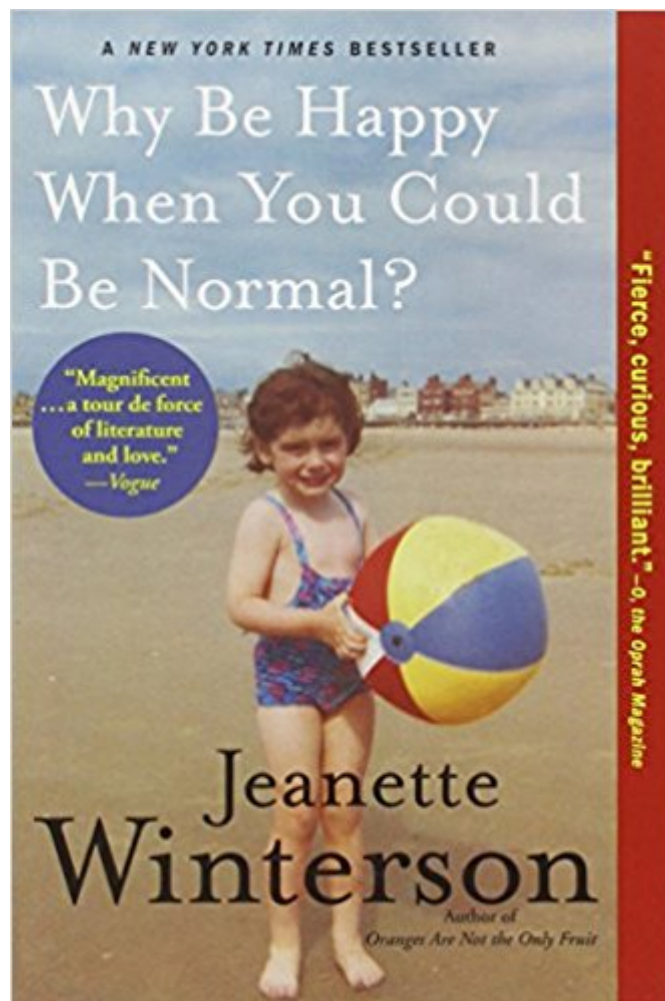




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Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?



Synopsis

"Magnificent . . . A tour de force of literature and love."#151;Vogue"Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? is raucous. It hums with a dark refulgence from its first pages. . . . Singular and electric . . . [Winterson's] life with her adoptive parents was often appalling, but it made her the writer she is."#151;The New York Times"[Winterson is] one of the most daring and inventive writers of our time#151;searingly honest yet effortlessly lithe as she slides between forms, exuberant and unerring, demanding emotional and intellectual expansion of herself and of us. . . . In *Why Be Happy*, [Winterson's] emotional life is laid bare . . . [in] a bravely frank narrative of truly coming undone. For someone in love with disguises, Winterson's openness is all the more moving; there's nothing left to hide, and nothing left to hide behind."#151;ElleJeanette Winterson's bold and revelatory novels have earned her widespread acclaim, establishing her as a major figure in world literature. She has written some of the most admired books of the past few decades, including her internationally best-selling first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the story of a young girl adopted by Pentecostal parents, that is now often required reading in contemporary fiction classes.*Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* is a memoir about a life's work to find happiness. It is a book full of stories: about a girl locked out of her home, sitting on the doorstep all night; about a religious zealot disguised as a mother who has two sets of false teeth and a revolver in the dresser, waiting for Armageddon; about growing up in a north England industrial town now changed beyond recognition; about the universe as a cosmic dustbin. It is the story of how a painful past, which Winterson thought she had written over and repainted, rose to haunt her later in life, sending her on a journey into madness and out again, in search of her biological mother. It is also a book about other people's literature, one that shows how fiction and poetry can form a string of guiding lights, a life raft that supports us when we are sinking.Witty, acute, fierce, and celebratory, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* is a tough-minded search for belonging#151;for love, identity, home, and a mother.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In her new memoir, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, Winterson returns to the source, her grim girlhood in a sooty English industrial town in the 1960s, to tell her story more forthrightly than she has before. Aiming for narrative tidiness tends to dilute this memoir's delightfully unorthodox quality. But for the most part, this bullet of a book is charged with risk, dark mirth, and hard-won self-knowledge. —Parul Sehgal --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"*Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* is raucous. It hums with a dark refulgence from its first pages. . . . Singular and electric . . . [Winterson's] life with her adoptive parents was often appalling, but it made her the writer she is." —The New York Times "She's one of the most daring and inventive writers of our time; searingly honest yet effortlessly lithe as she slides between forms, exuberant and unerring, demanding emotional and intellectual expansion of herself and of us. . . . She explores not only the structure of storytelling by the interplay of past, present, and future, blending science fiction, realism, and a deep love of literature and history. . . . In *Why Be Happy*, [Winterson's] emotional life is laid bare. [Her] struggle to first accept and then love herself yields a bravely frank narrative of truly coming undone. For someone in love with disguises, Winterson's openness is all the more moving; there's nothing left to hide, and nothing left to hide behind." —A.M. Homes, *Elle* "To read Jeanette Winterson is to love her. . . . The fierce, curious, brilliant British writer is winningly candid in *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* . . . [Winterson has] such a joy for life and love and language that she quickly becomes her very own one-woman band; one that, luckily for us, keeps playing on." —O, the Oprah Magazine "Magnificent . . . What begins as a tragicomic tale of triumph over a soul-destroying childhood becomes something rougher and richer in the later passages. . . . Winterson writes with heartrending precision. . . . Ferociously funny and unfathomably generous, Winterson's exorcism-in-writing is an unforgettable quest for belonging, a tour de force of literature and love." —Vogue "A memoir as unconventional and winning as *[Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit]*,

the rollicking bildungsroman . . . that instantly established [Winterson's] distinctive voice. . . . It's a testament to Winterson's innate generosity, as well as her talent, that she can showcase the outsize humor her mother's equally capacious craziness provides even as she reveals cruelties Mrs. Winterson imposed on her. . . . To confront Mrs. Winterson head on, in life, in nonfiction, demands courage; to survive requires imagination. . . . But put your money on Jeanette Winterson. Seventeen books ago, she proved she had what she needed. Heroines are defined not by their wounds, but by their triumphs."#151;New York Times Book Review"Jeanette Winterson's sentences become lodged in the brain for years, like song lyrics. . . . Beautiful . . . Powerful . . . Shockingly revealing . . . Raw and undigested . . . Never has anyone so outsized and exceptional struggled through such remembered pain to discover how intensely ordinary she was meant to be."#151;Slate"Bold . . . One of the most entertaining and moving memoirs in recent memory . . . A coming-of-age story, a coming-out story, and a celebration of the act of reading . . . A marvelous gift of consolation and wisdom."#151;The Boston Globe"Unflinching . . . That Winterson should have survived such a terrible early immersion in darkness at all is a kind of miracle. That she should have emerged, if not unscathed then still a functioning human being and a creative artist, is an even greater accomplishment."#151;San Francisco Chronicle"With raw honesty and wit, Winterson reveals how she fought her way to adulthood, finding success, love#151;and ultimately forgiveness."#151;People (4 stars)"There's always been something Byronic about Winterson#151;a stormily passionate soul bitterly indicting the society that excludes her while feeding on the Romantic drama of that exclusion. . . . Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? restores Winterson to her full power. . . . This is a book that will inspire much underlining."#151;Salon"[Winterson's] novels#151;mongrels of autobiography, myth, fantasy, and formal experimentation#151;evinced a colossal stamina for self-scrutiny. . . . [A] proud and vivid portrait of working-class life . . . This bullet of a book is charged with risk, dark mirth, hard-won self-knowledge. . . . You're in the hands of a master builder who has remixed the memoir into a work of terror and beauty."#151;Bookforum"Riveting . . . Beautifully open . . . Why Be Happy is a meditation on loss, stories, and silences."#151;Newsday"Riveting . . . There's a lot of flinty humor here, a lot of insight into the emotional legacy of adoption#151;and a generally refreshing admission that understanding life is as hard as living it."#151;Entertainment Weekly (A-) "Arresting and suspenseful . . . Offers literary surprises and flashes of magnificent generosity and humor."#151;The Washington Post Book World"[Why Be Happy] very possibly [contains] the most honest writing Winterson has ever done: bone-hard, bone-naked truth that hides nothing about the discovery process of finding her biological

mother, and going mad. . . . Her observations read as verses of the King James Bible: bold, beautiful, and true."#151;Los Angeles Review of Books"Captivating . . . A painful and poignant story of redemption, sexuality, identity, love, loss, and, ultimately, forgiveness."#151;Huffington Post"Raw . . . A highly unusual, scrupulously honest, and endearing memoir."#151;Publishers Weekly (starred review)"Clarion, courageous, and vividly expressive, Winterson conducts a dramatic and revelatory inquiry into the forging of the self and liberating power of literature."#151;Booklist (starred)"[Winterson] is piercingly honest, deeply creative, and stubbornly self-confident. . . . A testimony to the power of love and the need to feel wanted."#151;The Seattle Times"Winterson pulls back the veil on her life as she really lived it and shows us that truth is not only stranger than fiction, but more painful and more beautiful as well. . . . Searing and candid . . . Winterson holds nothing back. . . . Written with poetic beauty."#151;Bookpage"Shattering, brilliant . . . There is a sense at the end of this brave, funny, heartbreaking book that Winterson has somehow reconciled herself to the past. Without her adoptive mother, she wonders what she would be#151;Normal? Uneducated? Heterosexual?#151;and she doesn't much fancy the prospect. . . . She might have been happy and normal, but she wouldn't have been Jeanette Winterson. Her childhood was ghastly, as bad as Dickens's stint in the blacking factory, but it was also the crucible for her incendiary talent."#151;The Sunday Times (UK)"Unconventional, ambitious . . . The experience of reading *Why Be Happy* is unusually visceral. Winterson confronts her actions, personality quirks, even sexuality, with a kind of violence, as if forcing herself to be honest. . . . The prose is often breathtaking: witty, biblical, chatty, and vigorous all at once."#151;Financial Times "An extraordinary tragic-comic literary autobiography."#151;The Guardian (Best Book of 2011)"Searing . . . Winterson's truth is just as compelling as any fiction."#151;Entertainment Weekly (The Must List)"Moving, honest . . . Rich in detail and the history of the northern English town of Accrington, Winterson's narrative allows readers to ponder, along with the author, the importance of feeling wanted and loved."#151;Kirkus Reviews"Compelling, in fact, perhaps even more so when compared to the fictionalized version written by Winterson as a twenty-five-year-old. Then, passion and anger seemed to burn off the page. . . . Now comes [an] emotional excavation as a fifty-two-year-old looking back with a cooler, more forgiving eye. . . . The specifics of [Winterson's] early abuse are vivid, violent, and no less horrifying for their familiarity. . . . If the memoir was begun as a final exorcism of the monster mother, it ends with a moving acceptance of her."#151;The Independent (UK)"Stunningly lovely and fearlessly reflective, *Why Be Happy* is a reminder of what the project of remembering and recording can#151;and should#151;be."#151;Bookreporter"Exquisite . . . About survival and triumph but also about deep

wounds."#151;LAMDA Literary Review"Winterson's memoir is a brave and searingly honest account of how she reclaimed her childhood through the power of language. . . . Rich in autobiographical detail, it is as wide and bold an experiment in the memoir form as any so far written. Indeed, one of the most daring#151;and riskiest#151;experiments this book pulls off is a sudden fast-forward from the world of the lonely, adopted child that we think we know from *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, to the recent present where, in writing that is astonishingly naked and brave, Winterson reveals the legacy of that difficult childhood. . . . Why Be Happy is proudly, and sometimes painfully honest. It is also, arguably, the finest and most hopeful memoir to emerge in many years, and, as such, it really should not be missed."#151;The Times (UK)"As compulsively readable as *Truth and Beauty*, Ann Patchett's great memoir of friendship. . . . A tribute to the salvation of narrative."#151;Shelf Awareness"At last#151;and essential new book by Jeanette Winterson. She is a natural memoirist. . . . Wry, urgent . . . Pressed on by the need for self-discovery, the prose doesn't miss a beat. . . . Winterson is frank about her own oddness, her fierceness. . . . If the first half of the book has been polished by retelling, the second half is raw, immediate. . . . Gone is the Nabokovian memoir in which the exquisite past is presented under glass, skewered by a pin. This is the age of instant communication, of forthright, unmediated responses. Winterson has her finger to the wind."#151;Evening Standard (UK)#147;Provides a vivid picture of the grotesque behaviors of the lunatic mother she refers to as #145;Mrs. Winterson.Ã¢â This is a detailed portrait of a life that saved itself. The hard work Winterson did to find her place in the world after growing up as an outsiderÃ¢âs outsider is not exaggerated. We are lucky she survived to tell the tale.Ã¢â#151;Library Journal (starred review)"As beautifully crafted as any of Winterson's fiction."#151;Foreword"Winterson makes the pages sing. . . . A moving, artfully constructed piece of writing that sustains tension until the last sentence."#151;The Globe and Mail (Favorite Book of the Year)#147;Idiosyncratic . . . [Winterson] is intense on the page . . . [with] more charisma than a Pentecostal preacher. . . . A sad story, a funny story, a brave story.Ã¢â#151;The Scotsman"This is no narrative of victimhood, but one of gratitude. In its lugubrious humor, its striving to find virtue in unlikely places and in its willingness to try to understand the forces that damaged her mother, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* recalls a feminine version of Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*. . . . Winterson lends all [her] fierce poetry, intelligence, and epigrammatic punch to [the] prose. . . . Thrilling as the author may be in the denunciation of her mother, the tale as a whole foregrounds the woman's vulnerability; empathy keeps breaking through."#151;The Australian"We are shown 'how it is when the mind works with its own brokenness,' and come to respect Winterson's psychological courage

and her rage to love."#151; Sunday Telegraph" This difficult, spirited, engaging book, with its touching openness and maddening lack of candor, is a resonant affirmation of the power of storytelling to make things better."#151; The Daily Mail

"Books, for me, are a home. Books don't make a home-they are one, in the sense that just as you do with a door, you open a book, and you go inside. Inside there is a different kind of time and a different kind of space. There is warmth there too - a hearth. I sit down with a book and I am warm. I know that from the chilly nights on the doorstep." pg. 61

Jeanette Winterson grew up in an unhappy, abusive, and religious Pentecostal family. She was adopted at a young age and her mother planned to mold her into a missionary of God. Yet Jeanette heard time and time again that her parents were led to the wrong crib. Jeanette grew up with the knowledge that she never really belonged. She didn't belong to her adoptive parents, she didn't belong to her birth parents, she didn't belong to her public school because she was so religious and she didn't belong to her church because she was a lesbian. She spent many nights outside, alone on her doorstep. She was kicked out of her home at the age of 16 and was homeless living in her car. Growing up, books were forbidden in her house and so the library became a haven and she began to read every author from A to Z in English Literature. She applied to Oxford and to her surprise got in as the "working class" experiment. Jeanette then writes her first book, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, when she was 24. Some words of advice: Read *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* before you read this book. It will make a big difference. I once heard that if you don't deal with the trauma of your past, that the trauma will find you and make you deal with it. Well that is what happened to Jeanette. She sunk into a type of madness, became depressed and emerged forever changed. When Jeanette decides to go on with her life she then makes the decision to find her birth mother. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* is an amazing memoir. It is not told in a linear fashion but it is full of life and passion. Complex, yet simply told, Winterson bares her soul, telling her readers that she never learned how to love nor how to be loved. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* is an explanation of her book, *Oranges* and a confession of a very painful past. She divulges her tumultuous past with style, wit and grace all the while showing her readers, wisdom and the strength to endure. I was so inspired and riveted to Jeanette's story and have many passages of wisdom marked in my book. This memoir is deeply personal to Winterson and to me, as the reader. I felt I was looking into the window of her soul. "Nobody can feel too much, though many of us work very hard at feeling too little. Feeling is frightening. Well, I find it so." Pg. 187

Ever run across a book and an author that just bends your mind? This is how I felt as soon as I started the audio unabridged version of this book, and so had to buy the paperback as well. It is read by the author and what a reading it is. I cannot remember when I have delighted in a book as much as I have this one and especially the vocal done by the author herself. It's a hard story. Much of the early part is a little hard to take, but sometimes it seems that people go through tough things and come out stronger on the other end. This seems to be the case with the woman who took charge of her education at Cambridge, and then became the author of many books, one of which became a TV presentation. Having never heard of Jeanette Winterson made it all the more interesting. There is such talent out in the world that we've never heard of and when we find them, when they touch us with that special touch, we are instantly changed for the better. Since I am a huge audible.com fan and am constantly downloading books there, this book was a recommendation by them and I'm so glad they did. I delighted in virtually every word, every inflection, and how love prevails, even when it doesn't seem like love. It all depends on our perspective. I cannot recommend this book enough and especially the unabridged audiobook. Bravo!

I am not a huge memoir reader but I'm grateful I did. I'm grateful she shared the journey and the lessons which were sometimes hard to read. I let myself be wrapped (and rapt, it's Jeanette Winterson) in the words and 'listened' while she filled in some of her story from there to here and what she learned. The message that meant the most to me at the time: It's important to honour the gifts that come with the pain. What I heard, for her, was an affirmation to the nature and make up of the story-teller, one of our best. One more thing, Winterson first rocked our little world with *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. I think there may be some tendency to read this memoir as *Oranges Part Two* despite Winterson's open statements that *Oranges* wasn't a biography as defined in the dictionary (though certainly some similarities exist). I would remind the buyer of her admonition and let this work stand on its own. That said... I encourage the purchase.

I was worried I wouldn't get much out of this book because I hadn't read Winterson's earlier work *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (everybody seems to bring it up in relation to this autobiography) but the truth is I haven't devoured a book in this way in years. It's about religion and self-discovery and literature and feminism, it's absurd and complex and grimly funny and often quite chilling. At one point Winterson complains that there's a stigma that women autobiographers can only write about things as they've happened while men write about the bigger universal issues -- well Winterson's

observations and beautiful way with language took my breath away again and again. I've NEVER underlined this much in any one book, and I'm sure I'll revisit this many times throughout my life.

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