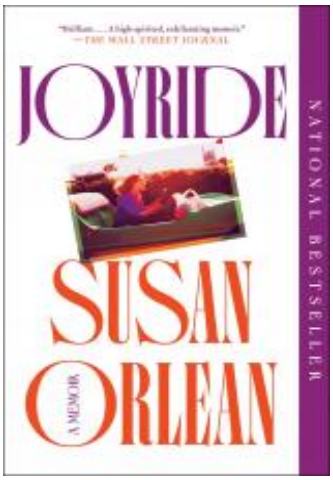
Joyride: A Memoir

by Susan Orlean



About the Book

From beloved *New Yorker* writer Susan Orlean, the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE ORCHID THIEF and THE LIBRARY BOOK, and hailed as ?a national treasure? by *The Washington Post,* JOYRIDE is a masterful memoir of finding her creative calling and purpose that invites us to approach life with wonder, curiosity and an irrepressible sense of delight.

?The story of my life is the story of my stories,? writes Susan Orlean in this extraordinary, era-defining memoir from one of the greatest practitioners of narrative nonfiction of our time. JOYRIDE is a magic carpet ride through Orlean?s life and career, where every day is an opportunity for discovery and every moment holds the potential for wonder. Throughout her storied career, her curiosity draws her to explore the most ordinary and extraordinary of places, from going deep inside the head of a regular 10-year-old boy for a legendary profile ("The American Man Age Ten") to reporting on a woman who owns 27 tigers, from capturing the routine magic of Saturday night to climbing Mt. Fuji.

Not only does Orlean?s account of a writing life offer a trove of indispensable gleanings for writers, it?s also an essential and practical guide to embracing any creative path. She takes us through her process of dreaming up ideas, managing deadlines, connecting with sources, chasing every possible lead, confronting writer?s block and self-doubt, and crafting the perfect lede --- a Susan specialty.

While Orlean has always written her way into other people?s lives in order to understand the human experience, JOYRIDE is her most personal book ever --- a searching journey through finding her feet as a journalist, recovering from the excruciating collapse of her first marriage, falling head-over-heels in love again, becoming a mother while mourning the decline of her own mother, sojourning to Hollywood for films based on her work, including *Adaptation* and *Blue Crush*, and confronting mortality. JOYRIDE is also a time machine to a bygone era of journalism, from Orlean?s bright start in the golden age of alt-weeklies to her career-making days working alongside icons such as Robert Gottlieb, Tina Brown, David Remnick, Anna Wintour, Sonny Mehta and Jonathan Karp --- forces who shaped the media

industry as we know it today.

Infused with Orlean?s signature warmth and wit, JOYRIDE is a must-read for anyone who hungers to start, build and sustain a creative life. Orlean inspires us to seek out daily inspiration and rediscover the marvels that surround us.

Discussion Guide

1. In the introduction, Susan Orlean says she has had ?the most wonderful life, a joyride of a life ? (page 5). She has built an inimitable body of work and a wonderful life for herself, but she?s also experienced disappointments and betrayals. Does a life well-lived include the tough moments? Can a ?joyride? include both joy and pain?

2. Orlean?s approach to interviewing is one without preparation, preferring to jump in blind rather than study a subject or individual at length prior to engaging with them. How did this tactic work to her advantage?

3. What does a typical Saturday night look like for you? How do you think your experiences fit Orlean?s concept --- that Saturday nights are significant and mean something different to everyone?

4. Orlean has roamed across the country and around the world interviewing thrilling subjects. However, she also has played in her own backyard and spent time investigating the lives of ?ordinary? people. Which of these kinds of stories appeal more to you? Are you drawn more to digging into the everyday, or to the unusual, striking and extraordinary?

5. What experiences that Orlean had as a journalist in the field sound most exciting or fulfilling to you? Any that you could imagine yourself taking part in?

6. What did you learn about the writing process from Orlean?

7. As a journalist, Orlean was ?always positioned...as the narrator, a few steps offstage, rather than being the subject? (294). Are there ways in your own life where you find yourself to be a guide rather than an actor, and do you find it as satisfying as Orlean does? Can you relate to her initial discomfort about positioning herself as the main character of this book?

8. Orlean gives a behind-the-scenes look at what it?s like to work for large publications like *The New Yorker*, as well as what it?s like to publish a book. Did anything about the writer?s life or the publishing world surprise you?

9. Orlean refers to a Senegalese expression used when someone has died, expressing that through their death, their library has burned. She reflects that ?the way our mind and memory function is library-like, a storehouse of individual volumes, each containing a thought or a dream or a memory or a sliver of knowledge? (265). What stories are in your library? Which ones are in your core collection?

10. How would you characterize Orlean?s storytelling? What tactics does she use to draw the reader in?

11. Orlean has lived all around the U.S., from Ohio to Oregon, New York to California. How did each of these places shape her as both a person and a writer?

12. In her conclusion, Orlean shares a piece of editing advice she got at *The New Yorker*, that asks her to abandon a final summary at the end and leave the reader ?to complete the piece in his or her own head? (296?97). Do you think that?s an effective way to end a story? What do you find to be the most satisfying endings? Is an ending being satisfying the most important thing?

Author Bio

Susan Orlean has been a staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 1992. She is the *New York Times* bestselling author of seven books, including THE LIBRARY BOOK, RIN TIN TIN, SATURDAY NIGHT, and THE ORCHID THIEF, which was made into the Academy Award?winning film *Adaptation*. She lives with her family and her animals in Los Angeles.

Joyride: A Memoir

by Susan Orlean

Publication Date: October 27, 2026
Genres: Memoir, Nonfiction
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster
ISBN-10: 1982135174
ISBN-13: 9781982135171