



The Art of Racing in the Rain

By Garth Stein

Harper Paperbacks, New York, NY (2009)

When a friend loaned me *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, I was not thrilled by the idea of reading a book about a talking dog. But about one-fourth of the way through this fascinating book, I actually began to believe that this dog could talk and think like a human.

Enzo is a retriever-terrier mix who is at the end of his life and is taking stock of what has transpired in his many years living with race car driver Denny Swift, his wife Eve and their daughter Zoe. He knows he is part retriever because he contends they are the problem solvers. He also laments the fact he cannot use his paws as hands because he has no thumbs, and he cannot speak the things he is thinking because his tongue is long and flat and loose. Enzo spends many hours watching television, mainly the National Geographic channel, and learned that it is possible for a dog to be reincarnated as a man, if he is ready. He believes he is ready.

Okay, so far the story sounds a bit odd, but stay with me. The dog's many observations about life are very insightful and thought-provoking. Through his master Denny, his racing career and his fascination with television, Enzo develops an amazing insight into the humans in his life and makes a big difference in their lives. He sees that life, like racing, is not just about going fast.

This is no Pollyanna story. It includes tragedy, sadness and vindictiveness, but most of all, it is funny, heart-wrenching and uplifting. Much is learned about love and loyalty, as well as hope.

Denny and Enzo suffer through the death of Denny's wife and the three-year battle over custody of Denny's daughter Zoe with her maternal grandparents, who use many questionable tactics to try to wrest custody of their granddaughter from her father. Enzo is a big help in eventually returning Zoe to her father's care, where she is at his side as he excels in his racing career.

Without giving away the remarkable ending, let it be said that *The Art of Racing in the Rain* will probably be the topic of many lively discussions among book clubs, couples, families and friends.

~Peggy Kiefer

Women, Writing, and Soul-Making: Creativity and the Sacred Feminine

By Peggy Tabor Millin

Story Water Press, a division of Clarity Press, Asheville, NC (2009)

As the weather turns colder, many of us feel a desire to stay close to home and hearth, as well as perhaps a drawing in toward the home that resides within each of us. There is something about winter — the bare trees, the brittle crisp of chilled air on our cheeks — that invites us to sink softly into what brings us solace and comfort and to settle more deeply into that rich storehouse in which we hold our stories and rich histories. Perhaps it is coded in our DNA to do so. When the nights grew long and cold, our ancestors gathered around the campfires, not only for the heat, but also for the warmth that came from sharing their own truths.

Each of us, no matter how commonplace we claim our lives to have been, possesses the key to our own storehouse of truths and will be surprised by the treasure that rests there. After all, we haven't gotten to this point without amassing years of stories, memories and connections. This cache of raw, but valuable, material is waiting to come to light in order to help us leave a legacy, to entertain or touch others, to challenge us and keep our brains sharp, or to simply provide form and understanding of our life experiences.

So, cozy up with a hot cup of tea and allow Peggy Tabor Millin's thoughtful book, *Women, Writing, and Soul-Making* to gently coax you on a journey of self-exploration and creativity. This is a book to be savored by those of us who identify ourselves as writers, as well as by those who've only picked up a pen to jot a thank-you note or a grocery list.

In fact, I rather wish the author had flipped the words around in the title to "Women, Soul-Making, and Writing" because this beautifully-crafted book serves, first, as a voice of wisdom guiding us to come home to ourselves spiritually using the tool of writing. You don't need to be a published or gifted writer to benefit from this nurturing process.

At the same time, the accomplished writer will not be disappointed. Ms. Millin is a patient and experienced teacher who nudges us to push aside obstacles, to polish our craft and to more fully develop our individual voice.

Whatever writing experience we bring, it is clear that we will emerge from this journey more acquainted with our private landscape and more adept at communicating our inner truths in a creative and clear manner.

A not-to-be-missed book for the sensitive, thoughtful and soul-seeking (including men, for that matter), *Women, Writing, and Soul-Making* is available from www.amazon.com and from the author's Web site: www.clarityworksonline.com and clicking on "Story Water Press."

~ Victoria Duncan

Cane River

By Lalita Tademy

Warner Books (2001)

Have you ever found a photograph of an ancestor and wondered what stories she could tell? Lalita Tademy, author of *Cane River*, became intrigued with the untapped mystery of her beautiful great-grandmother Emily Fredieu, a light-skinned slave born in 1861. Living in central Louisiana, Emily's beauty won her the affection of a white Frenchman for more than 30 years.

Tademy's quest to learn more about her great-grandmother resulted in years of research, genealogy and reading of family letters. She also visited Louisiana's Cajun country, far from Silicon Valley where she was a vice president of a Fortune 500 company. Eventually she quit her career to complete her book, which was featured on Oprah's Book Club and became a *New York Times* Bestseller.

With more than 500 pages, the book can appear intimidating until you begin to read. Immediately you are drawn back in time to the secluded backcountry of Louisiana to witness the lives of several generations of Tademy's ancestors. Like her bloodline, the story weaves together the intriguing worlds of the slaves, the French, the indigenous whites and free people of color. The result is a stunning mix of factual history, family story and fascinating culture.

The characters in this book became my companions this summer as my husband and I sailed to Maine. If you are in search of a good read this winter, I invite you to travel to the land of *Cane River*.

~ Leslie Payne



Do you have a dream or special want? What's keeping you from getting started?