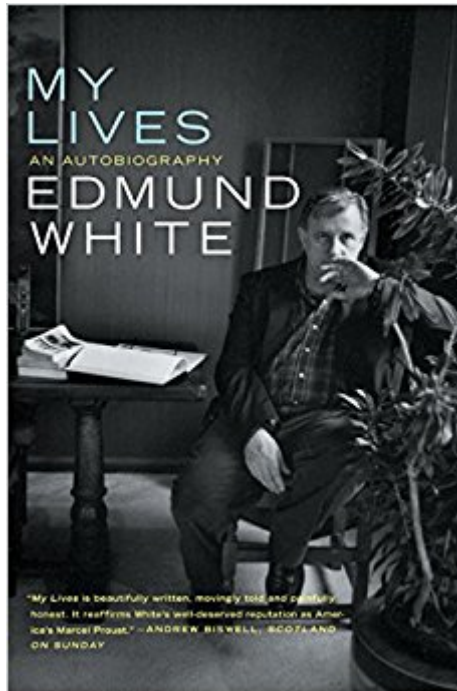




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# My Lives: An Autobiography



## Synopsis

No one has been more frank, lucid, rueful and entertaining about growing up gay in Middle America than Edmund White. Best known for his autobiographical novels, starting with *A Boy's Own Story*, White here takes fiction out of his story and delivers the facts of his life in all their shocking and absorbing verity. From an adolescence in the 1950s, an era that tried to "cure his homosexuality" but found him "unsalvageable," he emerged into a 1960s society that redesignated his orientation as "acceptable (nearly)." He describes a life touched by psychotherapy in every decade, starting with his flamboyant and demanding therapist mother, who considered him her own personal test case -- and personal escort to cocktail lounges after her divorce. His father thought that even wearing a wristwatch was effeminate, though custodial visits to Dad in Cincinnati inadvertently initiated White into the culture of "hustlers and johns" that changed his life. In *My Lives*, White shares his enthusiasms and his passions -- for Paris, for London, for Jean Genet -- and introduces us to his lovers and predilections, past and present. "Now that I'm sixty-five," writes White, "I think this is a good moment to write a memoir. . . . Sixty-five is the right time for casting a backward glance, while one is still fully engaged in one's life."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. White -- a prolific essayist, novelist, biographer (of Proust and Genet), travel writer, critic and all-around man of letters -- has mined the events and circumstances of his own life frequently and vividly, and has been the subject of two biographies. Wisely, he has not attempted a straightforward autobiography, but instead a collection of essays or meditations,

beginning, tellingly, with "My Shrinks," an introduction to his early struggles with homosexuality and later with other problems; the psychoanalytic process led him to "the conviction that everyone is worth years and years of intense scrutiny" — not a bad credo for a novelist." Essays on White's divorced parents — his conservative Republican father and hard-working, indulgent mother — are followed by "My Hustlers," which features the kind of candid writing about sex and relationships that has made White a gay icon. His close women friends aren't neglected, nor is the expatriate life he has often described before, including his friendship with French philosopher Michel Foucault. White delivers more on sex than any other subject (which will please many of his fans), but there's plenty more in these gracefully written pieces to engage the intellect, the emotions and even that part of us that responds to name-dropping. For a Princeton professor, White gets around. Photos. (Apr. 1) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Readers will quickly come to realize the reason why this esteemed American writer pluralizes the word life in the title of his memoirs. Now in his midsixties, White (author of a previous memoir, *A Boy's Own Story*, 1982, and *Fanny: A Fiction*, 2003, among others) has no interest in a cradle-to-present-day remembrance of his life, no fondness--this time--for any sort of traditional, seamless autobiographical flow. He chooses, instead, to recall significant events, individuals, places, and personal habits in chapter format. So, anecdotes and thoughts about his parents are clustered in chapters called, not surprisingly, "My Mother" and "My Father." Where and with whom he spent much of his adult life is explored in "My Hustlers," "My Europe," and "My Friends." The thread of his early realized homosexuality connects the chapters, and, fortunately, he indicates a middle-age acceptance of inner resources as compensation for the physical bloom having fallen off the rose. Sexually explicit, rich in language, an open and unafraid self-estimation. Brad Hooper Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

In *MY LIVES*, Edmund White at 65 has finally written his autobiography, saying that now is "the right time for casting a backward glance, while one is still fully engaged in one's life." And if we are to believe what the author tells us about himself, engaged he still is. Instead of writing a conventional chronological narrative, Mr. White divides his book into chapters with titles like "My Shrinks," "My Father," "My Mother," "My Hustlers," "My Blonds," "My Friends," etc. He avoids saying much about subjects and people he has already covered in his earlier autobiographical novels, so he omits much discussion about his HIV status or the work that he has done in the fight against

AIDS-- he was one of the founders of the GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis), for example, having been at ground zero when the AIDS epidemic hit in the early 80's. I wish he had said more about how living with HIV for over twenty years-- although he remains healthy-- has affected both his world view and his writing. What Mr. White does is give the reader a lot of information about his parents and people he has known-- a lot of whom he has had sex with-- over the years. (One marvels at his obvious continuing stamina at 65.) He, however, is neither easy on himself nor his parents, letting the reader know that his mother first learned of his father's infidelity when he gave her a sexually transmitted disease. He also relates that his father tried to seduce his daughter when she was 13 or 14 and describes him as "one of the most boring men ever to draw breath." He writes in minute detail of his own sexual adventures, often portraying himself in a less than favorable light. While White writes about his "passivity and self-hatred," he also maintains that he is a really good friend, listing his qualities "necessary in a friend--tenacity, a large capacity for acceptance, curiosity, a genuine pleasure in other people's happiness." He encourages other fledgling writers, something easy to prove outside this memoir since all one has to do is read the many endorsements he freely gives other writers. If you are looking for a positive role model to assist young gay men to assimilate into the greater heterosexual society, you should look elsewhere. If you are interested, however, in an honest account of one gay man's journey through the last half of the 20th Century, you'll be rewarded for your efforts. For those youngsters who may find fault with Mr. White, just remember that you cannot conceive of what it was like to have been a gay teenager during the repressive Eisenhower 1950's. His remembrance of that era is totally accurate. No one writing in English today is better at words than Mr. White. His imagery is superb: "He [Charles Silverstein] taught me the subtle ways in which internalized homophobia had left its traces all over me, like a lapdog's muddy footprints on clean sheets." Or White's description of his mother after she and his father were divorced: "It was as if after hobbling around with bound feet she were suddenly unbandaged and told to become a marathon runner." At a Parisian dinner party, he is "the inevitable American oak leaf in his 'Gilles' table when it was fully extended." Finally, Mr. White's description of blonds (p. 294) is beautiful beyond description; it is well worth reading the first 293 pages of this memoir in order to get to that passage.

A wonderful read! Book in very good condition.

A wonderfully personal and times brutally honest description of a very interesting and complicated life - a life that spans a period of real social and political change which is all touched on thru the

encounters and experiences in this brilliantly written biographical piece.

Edmund White is a magical biographer. And, when it comes to writing his own autobiography, he is beyond compare. White's autobiography is breathtaking from the first paragraph. It is truly a work of genius.

The chapters of Edmund White's *My Lives* may be named *My Mother*, *My Hustlers*, *My Master*, but he jumps from subject to subject with no transitions. He acknowledges his partner for being the first to hear what Edmund has written. But obviously the partner is no editor. The book should be titled *My Digressions*. Because White can vividly describe a person in few words, we think he has depth. He doesn't. His astuteness hides shallowness. His writing deserves better content. He writes to be read: He craves approval. When he sleeps with someone, he wonders how the lover perceives him. When he writes, he wonders how the reader will perceive him. He knows that all his life he has been able to charm people into loving him; now he thinks he can tell us everything, especially the things he considers disgusting, and that he will be able to still self-deprecatingly charm us. "Here I am," he might as well write, "faults and all. Now love me. Or (preferably) not." After all his therapy he has not learned that no one can validate him except himself. How can we love-how can we read-a man with this much self-hatred? He has become what he fears most: boring.

Oy..this book gave me a headache. Too many swirling metaphors, too many clever rambling sentences...when one finally goes screeching to a halt and then putt..putt..putters right into another out of control (to me) stream of consciousness expressed in too many words I had to look up on my desktop dictionary. This guy makes Gore Vidal look like a 5th grade level writer. I've read many authors and can usually absorb what they are trying to say..but alot of this book was like reading a foreign language to me, and I just lost interest, it was too much work. I have no idea if Mr. White is a "nice" man or a pretentious ass, but what I DID come away with from trying to get through this book , other than a headache, was a depressed mood that required 1/2 an "emergency" xanax...It just seemed like a life devoid of any REAL pleasure or meaning, everything seemed totally futile, when it wasn't just blase..(pronounced .."blozzzeyyy"..lol..) And the sex...okay, I get it, there is more to sex than just wham bam..(well..SO I've heard!) but I REALLY can't think of any reason why I would need, nor want.. to hear about someone performing oral sex on someone whilst they are poo-ing. Hey, I'm an averagely attractive ageing guy who, though I appreciate it, .. does not now nor have I ever worshipped at the alter of male beauty. Or, worse yet, made myself feel like a repulsive reject

when you can't compete with that (you'd be AMAZED at what a little humor and a homemade streudel can accomplish!...lol.) I had a horrifically abused childhood, and when I was old enough to liberate myself, I did, and other than a few self pitying periods, never looked back. A negative past doesn't HAVE to be who you are, or create a life of self indulgent self flagellation. Oh well, maybe I just missed the point of this book, so let's just go back to my title for this review and leave it at that: I am too dumb to successfully read this book.

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