

CELINE'S STORY

I still remember the feel of the elephant-gray bark of the tree I climbed as a young girl and its musty smell, the way it broke off crisply in my fingers. I'd perch in the wide V of its thick comforting branches, open my book, and be lost in other worlds. Or I'd insert a tiny gold key into the lock of my diary and be drawn by its stark white pages to explore my thoughts and feelings and to imagine far-off adventures.

I grew up in a working class community in Queens, my family strictly Catholic yet politically liberal, of Irish and French-Canadian descent, in a world of brick and concrete. (Here I am at the age of three, with my mother, the apartment complex behind us.)



Yet I found my way to nature, sneaking whenever possible onto the wooded grounds of a nearby mental hospital. There, wandering in the woods or aloft in my tree, I could read, observe, and imagine. When my father died when I was 10, writing became an even more crucial refuge. At age 11, I began my first novel with the dreadful title *Heavenly Days*. It had no discernible plot, but I was undeterred; I wanted to be a writer.



In high school I landed a prestigious position at the Woolworth's candy counter; later I was a franks and beer vendor at Shea Stadium. But I wanted a life of significance, something "bigger" than that prescribed by my background and gender. During college I discovered Greenwich Village, lived for dance parties, and found my way into politics and social issues, diving head first into the antiwar and feminist movements. I felt I had found my true purpose: to write and to do some good in the world.

Having come of age in the countercultural '60s and '70s, to this day I have long hair, wear mostly denim, and carry a backpack rather than a purse. After college I traveled to California to volunteer for the United Farm Workers Union in its struggle for social justice. I returned to do community organizing in Queens, New York, living in a collective. These experiences inform my first novel, *Layla*, which is about antiwar activism, an intergenerational clash of values, and community.

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My love of books led to a career in the publishing industry, primarily as a copyeditor, a field that satisfies the obsessive-compulsive in me and my need for perfection and order. I also earned a Masters in Creative Writing from City University of New York.

Play for Me was sparked by a rediscovered passion for guitar in midlife as well as by my sister's struggle with being an empty-nester. (Here I am with my sister, my closest friend, on the day of her wedding—she was just 19 years old!)



The study of classical guitar opened up a new world for me, including writing music journalism. The novel centers on a woman who becomes reengaged with music after her only son leaves home for college. She throws caution to the wind to follow a duo on the road and get closer to the mystery of creation. The story is about personal fulfillment, the necessity of beauty, and second chances. In all my fiction I am driven to explore characters for whom political and social engagement, or the arts, or the beauty of nature is transformative.



I live in Manhattan and Montauk with my husband of more than 30 years. I'm a beach person, he's a mountain guy, so we spend time in the woods of the Adirondacks in an off-the-grid cabin complete with outhouse, as well as at the beach.

He's Jewish but can't quite explain what he thinks that means. Although I no longer consider myself a Catholic, I retain an ascetic streak and always eat my spinach first. (But I also always have a secret stash of chocolate.)

