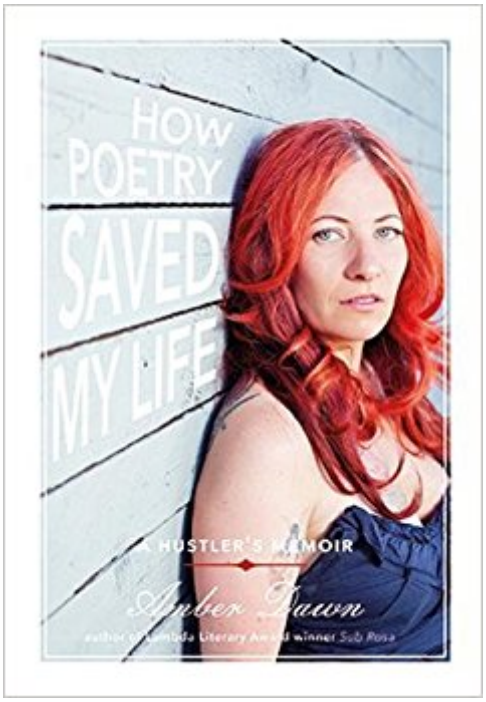
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# How Poetry Saved My Life: A Hustler's Memoir




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## Synopsis

City of Vancouver Book Award winnerAs raw and fiery as its author, How Poetry Saved My Life is a powerful account of survival and the transformative power of literature.Amber Dawn's acclaimed first novel Sub Rosa, a darkly intoxicating fantasy about a group of magical prostitutes who band together to fend off bad johns in a fantastical underworld, won a Lambda Literary Award in 2011. While the plot of the book was wildly imaginative, it was also based on the author's own experience as a sex worker in the 1990s and early 2000s, and on her coming out as lesbian.How Poetry Saved My Life, Amber Dawn's sophomore book, reveals an even more poignant and personal landscape—the terrain of sex work, queer identity, and survivor pride. This memoir, told in prose and poetry, offers a frank, multifaceted portrait of the author's experiences hustling the streets of Vancouver, and the how those years took away her self-esteem and nearly destroyed her; at the crux of this autobiographical narrative is the tender celebration of poetry and literature, that—as the title suggests—acted as a lifeline during her most pivotal moments.Amber Dawn is the author of Sub Rosa, editor of Fist of the Spider Woman: Tales of Fear and Queer Desire (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2009), and co-editor of With a Rough Tongue: Femmes Write Porn (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005). She won the Writers' Trust of Canada Dayne Ogilivie Prize for emerging LGBT writers in 2012. She lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Amber DawnÃ¢â ¬â„¢s voice is heartbreakingly sensitive, yet unabashed. The empowerment and solace she found in the poetry that saved her life is contagious." —GO Magazine"An

emotionally difficult but revealing read about the sex industry and the lifestyle of sex workers in which the author encourages more frankness and discussion in the future." —Library Journal"Defiant and proud, Amber Dawn’s memoir categorically refuses silence, daring to imagine a better world while offering hopeful testimony for those subsisting in abject spaces its author has since vacated." —Vancouver Sun"Powerful and necessary ... The book’s very structure rails against convention and expectation, linking together poems, prose poems, and narrative storytelling to build a cohesive portrait of Dawn’s queer identity, her life as a sex worker, an assault survivor, an activist, a writer and an artist. It is tender and biting, gorgeous and courageous, even heroic and, above all, it is hers." Ã¢â ¬â •National Post"How Poetry Saved My Life is every bit as forthright as Amber Dawn’s novel Sub Rosa, with the bonus of being a subtly pitched call to arms." Ã¢â ¬â •The Globe and Mail

Amber Dawn: Amber Dawn is a writer, filmmaker, and performance artist. She is the author of the Lambda Literary Award-winning novel Sub Rosa, editor of Fist of the Spider Woman, and co-editor of With a Rough Tongue. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. She is also winner of the Dayne Ogilvie Prize from the Writers’ Trust of Canada.

I had heard Amber Dawn read at the Sex Workers Art Show in Atlanta, GA, several years ago and I’d been wanting to hear more from her since then. How Poetry Saved My Life is wonderfully and intelligently written, enlightening and sometimes heartbreaking. But it’s not a sob story. It’s not a tale of rescue. It’s simply her truth.How Poetry Saved My life is a fast read in terms of page count, but it’s a lush and thought-stirring one. I sincerely hope to see more of Dawn’s writing and poetry soon.

What an incredible talent. One of the most important books I’ve read in years.

So many memoirs are written by non-writers, so it’s exciting when you come across a tale of one life that is both fascinating in content and beautifully written.

PROUD OF HER SHARING. GOOD JOB! LETTING OTHERS KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE LIVED IS VALUABLE LOVE YOU. AND YOUR PARTNER.

This is maybe one of the top five best books I’ve read ever. My copy is full of underlines and notes and I want to quote it all the time.

Call yourself a feminist? Then you must read Amber Dawn's new book, How Poetry Saved My Life: A Hustler's Memoir. Scratch that. Call yourself a human? Read this book. Immediately. Amber Dawn has written a collection of wry, witty and heartbreaking observations on gender, butch-femme relations, desire and capitalism. Punctuated with finely-wrought poems that illuminate her memoir, How Poetry Saved My Life is full of unexpected gems, both in the muscle of the language and the beauty of the truths she is unafraid to speak. Until Amber Dawn's book, I had never realized the grief associated with lack of mourning rituals in the queer community. It was painful to remember my own dead, the dead that have simply disappeared, without services, without ceremony. The self-proclaimed possessor of "an enterprising pussy," Amber Dawn is also extremely funny. Refusing sentimentality, she maintains a fierce control of how and what she reveals in this memoir. When reading autobiography, I seek work that challenges my own unexamined beliefs and stereotypes, and gives me a window on life experiences outside my own. Amber Dawn delivers all this and more in her unforgettable new memoir.

How Poetry Saved My Life is a gorgeous example of an emotional journey told in prose and various forms of poetry. Amber Dawn's memoir is an invitation to visit places that "have been made silent, small or wounded." For this Vancouver, British Columbia author, it is "the terrain of sex work, queer identity, and survivor pride."Dawn invites readers to create a final section of How Poetry Saved My Life, exploring their own stories of survival and finding community. She has, in fact, scattered such challenges throughout the book.It's not characteristic to see an author's photo on the cover of her book nor is it typical to read the memoir of a sex worker, even though Dawn estimates there are over 10,000, mainly women, in Vancouver, B.C. alone.How Poetry Saved My Life opens with a quote by Jeanette Winterson from her memoir, Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal:A tough life needs a tough language--and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers--a language powerful enough to say how it is. It isn't a hiding place. It is a finding place.Dawn is indebted to "queers and feminists, sex workers and radical culture makers, nonconformists and trailblazers, artists and healers, missing woman and justice fighters for her writing." She says that her writing is comprised of the "struggles and accomplishments of many."How Poetry Saved My Life is divided into three sections--Outside, Inside and Inward. Outside is a testament to "outdoor or survival street work." As Dawn says, "Crisis and creativity can be a potent combination." Inside is about her "safer" indoor work during which time she developed her voice and craft as a writer and paid for her university education in creative writing. Inward offers reflections on what it means to Amber Dawn to

"gain personal reconciliation and closure."The poem, "Oral Tradition," that opens the Outside section is a glosa. In a glosa, a poet builds on another poet's idea by beginning with four lines, as an epigraph, from the poet's poem. In this case, Dawn has been inspired by Irving Layton's "The Fertile Muck." Each of the four stanzas ends with one of the lines of Layton's poem."Oral Tradition" is a beautifully crafted poem with "two sensibilities mingling," as the late poet P. K. Page said of the glosa. In the poem, the narrator has come to know an emptiness as "fertile / soil that waits for fireweed and milk thistles.""What Do Dreams About Flying Mean" is a pantoum with a particular pattern of line repetition. The first line becomes the last line--or in this case, the title is also the last line. "The poem circles back to its beginning, but with a deeper understanding," says Kate Braid, who mentored Dawn "into" the Creative Writing Department of the University of British Columbia. Dawn credits Braid as one of the several great poets "who did indeed save my life.""How Poetry Saved My Life" is a poem in which Dawn expresses gratitude including for poetry, "The written word can be a further witness/if you've willing to show yourself." Amber Dawn sees putting memories on paper as "an investment in one's self." It took her a while to release her stories and poems into the world, and yet she felt a duty to speak up. We can all be grateful and encouraged that she has. As she writes at the end of "Lying is the Work," one of her personal essays: "When this paragraph ends, this story is all yours."by Mary Ann Moorefor Story Circle Book Reviewsreviewing books by, for, and about women

After seeing Amber Dawn read at the Vancouver International Writers Festival, I put a hold on her book at the library. Glad I waited. How Poetry Saved My Life is AMAZING! Had to go to the local store and get a copy.Loved the line "...that buoyancy that comes when I observe my life as art..." and took action when my eyes cleared enough to type after the description of how difficult it is to mourn friends lost when they spent their lives near the edges of most of society.Amber Dawn's skill with both prose and poetry is astounding. I will recommend and more importantly, remember, this book into the conceivable future. I'm going to buy copies for gifts, and they'll be gifts of inspiration.

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