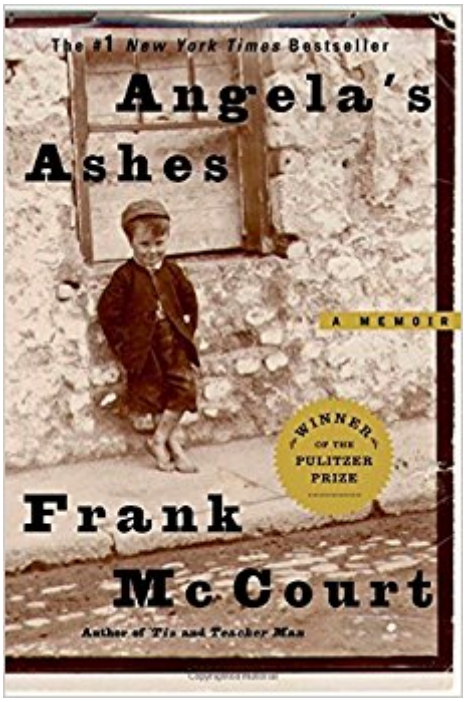
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Angela's Ashes (The Frank McCourt Memoirs)



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Synopsis

Angela’s Ashes, imbued on every page with Frank McCourt’s astounding humor and compassion, is a glorious book that bears all the marks of a classic."When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I managed to survive at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood." So begins the luminous memoir of Frank McCourt, born in Depression-era Brooklyn to recent Irish immigrants and raised in the slums of Limerick, Ireland. Frank’s mother, Angela, has no money to feed the children since Frank’s father, Malachy, rarely works, and when he does he drinks his wages. Yet Malachy -- exasperating, irresponsible and beguiling-- does nurture in Frank an appetite for the one thing he can provide: a story. Frank lives for his father’s tales of Cuchulain, who saved Ireland, and of the Angel on the Seventh Step, who brings his mother babies. Perhaps it is story that accounts for Frank’s survival. Wearing rags for diapers, begging a pig’s head for Christmas dinner and gathering coal from the roadside to light a fire, Frank endures poverty, near-starvation and the casual cruelty of relatives and neighbors--yet lives to tell his tale with eloquence, exuberance and remarkable forgiveness.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood," writes Frank McCourt in Angela’s Ashes. "Worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood." Welcome, then, to the pinnacle of the miserable Irish Catholic childhood. Born in Brooklyn in 1930 to recent Irish

immigrants Malachy and Angela McCourt, Frank grew up in Limerick after his parents returned to Ireland because of poor prospects in America. It turns out that prospects weren't so great back in the old country either--not with Malachy for a father. A chronically unemployed and nearly unemployable alcoholic, he appears to be the model on which many of our more insulting cliches about drunken Irish manhood are based. Mix in abject poverty and frequent death and illness and you have all the makings of a truly difficult early life. Fortunately, in McCourt's able hands it also has all the makings for a compelling memoir.

YA. Despite impoverishing his family because of his alcoholism, McCourt's father passed on to his son a gift for superb storytelling. He told him about the great Irish heroes, the old days in Ireland, the people in their Limerick neighborhood, and the world beyond their shores. McCourt writes in the voice of the child?with no self-pity or review of events?and just retells the tales. He recounts his desperately poor early years, living on public assistance and losing three siblings, but manages to make the book funny and uplifting. Stories of trying on his parents' false teeth and his adventures as a post-office delivery boy will have readers laughing out loud. Young people will recognize the truth in these compelling tales; the emotions expressed; the descriptions of teachers, relatives, neighbors; and the casual cruelty adults show toward children. Readers will enjoy the humor and the music in the language. A vivid, wonderfully readable memoir.?Patricia Noonan, Prince William Public Library, VACopyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

McCourt's story was very well written.The setting was Ireland and he brought the flavorof the Emerald Isle along with all its greenery to a bigger than life status!So much of the book was depressing yet he intermingled comedic parts throughout to keep it balanced and exciting!The reader was shown the perils of poverty and all its brutal effects on a family: the father, mother, children and relatives.In most cases it brought out the worst of people but some characters showed strength and resilience beyond imagination!The ending provided no resolutions and left you with a grave feeling of despair and uncertainty!It was a sad tale of woe which makes one wonder if any of us could ever endure what Frank and his family did and live to actually write about it?

I donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t think anyone would describe Frank McCourtÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s AngelaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Ashes, his account of growing up poor and starving in Ireland, as funny. Nevertheless, the many tragedies in his story are leavened by glimpses of humor. Near the beginning of his memoir, McCourt sets the scene in the following way:Out in the Atlantic Ocean

great sheets of rain gathered to drift slowly up the River Shannon and settle forever in Limerick. The rain dampened the city from the Feast of Circumcision to New YearÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Eve. It created a cacophony of hacking coughs, bronchial rattles, asthmatic wheezes, consumptive croaks. It turned noses into fountains, lungs into bacterial spongesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦The rain drove us into the churchÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œour refuge, our strength, our only dry place. At Mass, Benediction, novenas, we huddled in great damp clumps, dozing through priest drone, while steam rose again from our clothes to mingle with the sweetness of incense, flower and candles.Limerick gained a reputation for piety, but we knew it was only the rain. (1-2)We learn that it rains in LimerickLimerick, but Limerick is not just wet, it stays wet for eternity. The great sheets of rain drift slowly up the River Shannon and settle forever in Limerick (emphasis added). We learned that the rain dampened the city from the Feast of Circumcision to New YearÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Eve. Not only does the detail of the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœFeast of CircumcisionÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ sound humorous, but that sentence actually means that it stayed wet from January 1 to December 31. In the next sentence, McCourt takes things up a notch by providing us with a marvelous list of alliteration and onomatopoeia. Again, the details are compelling. We donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t just have a cacophony of coughs, which sounds clichÃƒÂ©d, but a cacophony of hacking coughs. Just when you think this canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t possibly get any worse, McCourt tops that sentence with the next one: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“It turned noses into fountains, lungs into bacterial sponges.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• After a few more sentences (omitted for brevity), we learn that the rain drove everyone into church, it was ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“our refuge, our strength, our only dry place.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• In this sentence, McCourt gives us a list which acts like a garden path sentence. It implies that itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s talking about one thing (the piety of the people of Limerick), when itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s actually talking about something else (their wish to get out of the rain). The next sentence gives us a marvelous image of all those people crowded into church in ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“great damp clumps, dozing through priest drone,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and this sets us up for the punch line at the end, that Limerick gained a reputation for piety, but ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“we knew it was only the rain.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•And so the story begins with some humor, to ease the way for the tragedies that follow. I highly recommend this memoir. Five Stars.

Having a curiosity of life in the depression and being part Irish and having been raised a Catholic, I found myself relating to the characters and their thinking in ways I would not have imagined possible. Sure, I didn't live through the depression, but my father did. He told his stories in a way that I was reminded by Frank McCourt - partly sad but with a mixture of humor and wit. I could relate

to the idea that I was the worst sinner in the world and bound for hell. This was one book that was hard for me to put down and a joy to get back to. I will have to read McCourt's other books now to see where they will take me. Thank you Frank McCourt.

Fun read about poverty, ignorance, and the Great Depression. Oh, yes, and there's plenty of adolescent sex.This is a story of a family who chose to move back to Ireland during the worst economic period in modern history. They prove that children can live on sugar water, tea, and bread fried in grease. And little else.The mastery here is that McCourt cn make us laugh out loud through all of this horror that he and his family suffers through. I did find the first chapter a bit of a slog, but by the second I caught onto his voice and enjoyed his ability to turn "oral story telling" into written literature. Be prepared for shifting points of view within paragraphs, no conventional indication of dialogue, and paragraphing that seems to come out of a drunken stupor.

I didn't realize the entire book was written from the perspective of an Irish child as he grew up, sometimes dealing with grown-up problems of survival, and making it through every day with an "I can do it" attitude and perseverance that made him become stronger and stronger and understanding about the trials and tribulations of real life. We don't fully understand about poverty until we read this book and how it is to live that way every day no matter what, and no matter whether your parents are doing their job (especially his alcoholic father). His mother was hanging on by a thread herself through many sad episodes of her own life, but she was doing the best that she could with what she had. I'm amazed he made it to adulthood with all the problems he faced.

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