



Autobiography

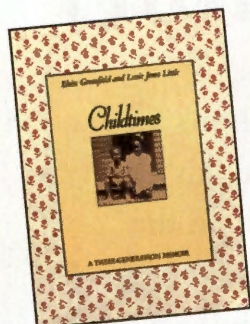
Autobiography is the story of a person's life as told by that person. The writer shares his or her memories, often adding new insights about the original events.

Autobiographies usually begin with the writer's childhood and work their way up to the present day. The life story might include people, animals, places, or events that were important to the writer. The selections you will read give some examples. But the final autobiographical piece will be yours. You'll be invited to write about an important event from your life.

Contents

"Langston Terrace," from <i>Childtimes</i>	574
<i>by Eloise Greenfield</i>	
"Jane Goodall" from <i>Talking with Adventurers</i>	579
<i>by Jane Goodall</i>	
from <i>Bill Peet: An Autobiography</i>	582
<i>by Bill Peet</i>	
from <i>Hit a Grand Slam!</i>	588
<i>by Alex Rodriguez with Greg Brown</i>	

In this selection from her autobiography, poet and author Eloise Greenfield describes a place that has played an important part in her life, the neighborhood where she grew up.



Langston Terrace by Eloise Greenfield

I fell in love with Langston Terrace the very first time I saw it. Our family had been living in two rooms of a three-story house when Mama and Daddy saw the newspaper article telling of the plans to build it. It was going to be a low-rent housing project in northeast Washington, and it would be named in honor of John Mercer Langston, the famous black lawyer, educator, and congressman.

So many people needed housing and wanted to live there, many more than there would be room for. They were all filling out applications, hoping to be one of the 274 families chosen. My parents filled out one, too.



I didn't want to move. I knew our house was crowded — there were eleven of us, six adults and five children — but I didn't want to leave my friends, and I didn't want to go to a strange place and be the new person in a neighborhood and a school where most of the other children already knew each other. I was eight years old, and I had been to three schools. We had moved five times since we'd been in Washington, each time trying to get more space and a better place to live. But rent was high so we'd always lived in a house with relatives and friends, and shared the rent.

One of the people in our big household was Lillie, Daddy's cousin and Mama's best friend. She and her husband also applied for a place in the new project, and during the months that it was being built, Lillie and Mama would sometimes walk fifteen blocks just to stand and watch the workmen digging holes and laying bricks. They'd just stand there watching and wishing. And at home, that was all they could talk about. "When we get our new place . . ." "If we get our new place . . ."

Lillie got her good news first. I can still see her and Mama standing at the bottom of the hall steps, hugging and laughing and crying, happy for Lillie, then sitting on the steps, worrying and wishing again for Mama.



Eloise with her brother and father at Langston Terrace in 1938.

Finally, one evening, a woman came to the house with our good news, and Mama and Daddy went over and picked out the house they wanted. We moved on my ninth birthday. Wilbur, Gerald, and I went to school that morning from one house, and when Daddy came to pick us up, he took us home to another one. All the furniture had been moved while we were in school.

Langston Terrace was a lovely birthday present. It was built on a hill, a group of tan brick houses and apartments with a playground as its center. The red mud surrounding the concrete walks had not yet been covered with black soil and grass seed, and the holes that would soon be homes for young trees were filled with rainwater. But it still looked beautiful to me.

We had a whole house all to ourselves. Upstairs and downstairs. Two bedrooms, and the living room would be my bedroom at night. Best of all, I wasn't the only new person. Everybody was new to this new little community, and by the time school opened in the fall, we had gotten used to each other and had made friends with other children in the neighborhood, too.

I guess most of the parents thought of the new place as an in-between place. They were glad to be there, but their dream was to save enough money to pay for a house that would be their own. Saving was hard, though, and slow, because each time somebody in a family got a raise on the job, it had to be reported to the manager of the project so that the rent could be raised, too. Most people stayed years longer than they had planned to, but they didn't let that stop them from enjoying life.



Eloise's sisters Vera (left) and Vedic Little, at Langston Terrace in 1949.

They formed a resident council to look into any neighborhood problems that might come up. They started a choral group and presented music and poetry programs on Sunday evenings in the social room or on the playground. On weekends, they played horseshoes and softball and other games. They had a reading club that met once a week at the Langston branch of the public library, after it opened in the basement of one of the apartment buildings.

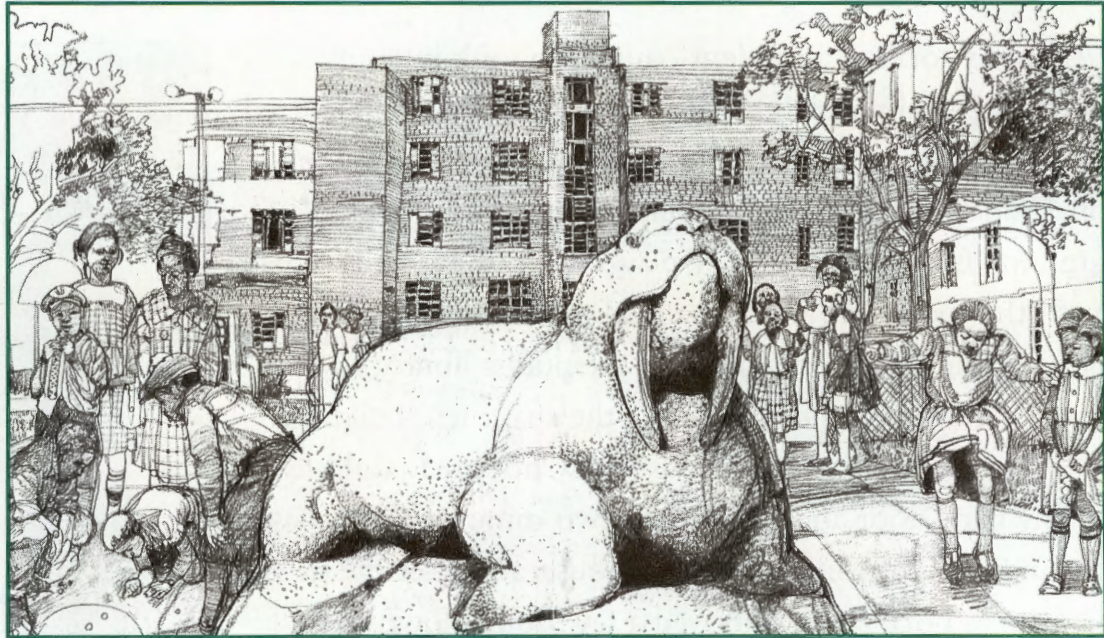
The library was very close to my house. I could leave by my back door and be there in two minutes. The playground was right in front of my house, and after my sister Vedic was born and we moved a few doors down to a three-bedroom house, I could just look out of my bedroom window to see if any of my friends were out playing.

There were so many games to play and things to do. We played hide-and-seek at the lamppost, paddle tennis and shuffleboard, dodge ball and jacks. We danced in fireplug showers, jumped rope to rhymes, played "Bouncy, Bouncy, Bally," swinging one leg over a bouncing ball, played baseball on a nearby field, had parties in the social room and bus trips to the beach. In the playroom, we played Ping-Pong and pool, learned to sew and embroider and crochet.

For us, Langston Terrace wasn't an in-between place. It was a growing-up place, a good growing-up place. Neighbors who cared, family and friends, and a lot of fun. Life was good. Not perfect, but good. We knew about problems, heard about them, saw them, lived through some hard ones ourselves, but our community wrapped itself around us, put itself between us and the hard knocks, to cushion the blows.



Eloise with her future husband, Bobby Greenfield, in 1948.



It's been many years since I moved away, but every once in a long while I go back, just to look at things and remember. The large stone animals that decorated the playground are still there. A walrus, a hippo, a frog, and two horses. They've started to crack now, but I remember when they first came to live with us. They were friends, to climb on or to lean against, or to gather around in the evening. You could sit on the frog's head and look way out over the city at the tall trees and rooftops.

Nowadays, whenever I run into old friends, mostly at a funeral, or maybe a wedding, after we've talked about how we've been and what we've been doing, and how old our children are, we always end up talking about our childhood in our old neighborhood. And somebody will say, "One of these days we ought to have a Langston reunion." That's what we always called it, just "Langston," without the "Terrace." I guess because it sounded more homey. And that's what Langston was. It was home.



In this brief autobiography, Jane Goodall, one of the world's foremost experts on chimpanzees, tells how her childhood interest in animals led her to doing research in Africa.

Jane Goodall



I have been interested in animals since before I can remember. From the time I was very small, I was fascinated with creepy, crawling, furry, flying creatures. When I was quite young, my mother found me in my room with a handful of worms in my bed, watching as they went around and around. She didn't say, "Yuk!" and throw them out the window. She said, "Jane, if you leave them in here, they'll die. They need the air." And so I let them go free.

In fact, my mother is the most important reason for my doing what I've done and being who I've been. When I was four years old, I stayed on a farm, where I helped

collect hens' eggs. I became puzzled and asked those around me, "Where is the hole big enough for the eggs to come out?" When no one answered to my satisfaction, I hid in a small, stuffy henhouse for four hours to find out. While I watched and waited, my mother looked frantically for me in the house and garden. She even called the police to help locate me. But when my mother saw me rushing toward the house in excitement, she didn't scold me for disappearing for so long. She sat down and listened to me tell the wonderful story of how a hen lays eggs.



Two orphaned chimpanzees (above) make friends in the Congo's Tchimpounga Sanctuary.

Goodall's study of chimpanzees, which began in 1960, is now in its fifth decade.

Even my first books were about animals. I read *The Story of Dr. Doolittle*, *The Jungle Book*, and *Tarzan*. Looking back, I see that the original Tarzan was terribly hard on animals. But I didn't realize it then. Books are a great source of inspiration. They lure your mind to be imaginative. By the time I was eight or nine, I was dreaming of going to Africa. And my mother, a very special person, would say, "Jane, if you really want something and if you work hard, take advantage of opportunities, and never give up, you will somehow find a way."

In those days you had to learn a foreign language to get a schol-

arship to a university. But I couldn't do it — I couldn't speak French, couldn't speak German, couldn't speak Latin. So Mum said, "Why not take a secretarial course, then you can get a job anywhere in the world." So that's what I did.

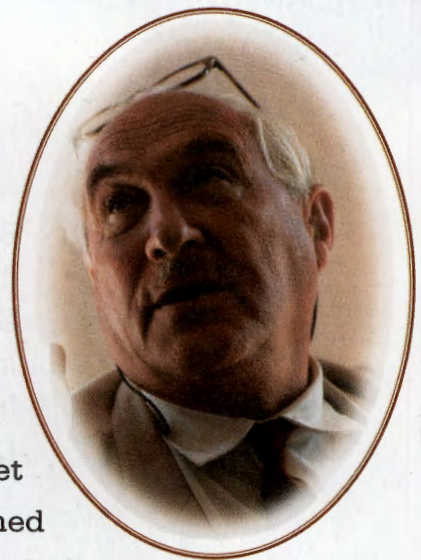
But that didn't lead me directly to Africa. After I finished my secretarial class I began working for a documentary film company — a wonderful job, but with very low pay. When a school friend invited me to visit her family in Kenya, I readily accepted. I quit my job with the film company to begin work as a waitress in order to save the money. Finally, at age 23,

with only enough money for boat fare to Africa (that was the cheapest way to travel in those days), I went off by myself to an unknown continent.

After two months in Africa I met the man who made all my dreams come true. Louis Leakey was an anthropologist and paleontologist who was interested in animals and early man. I made an appointment to meet him. Because I had studied animals throughout my childhood, I was able to answer many of his questions about the natural world, and he gave me a job as his assistant. I traveled with Louis and his wife, Mary, on one of their fossil-hunting expeditions to Olduvai Gorge. After some time, Louis decided I was the person he had been looking for to study the chimpanzees

living near the shore of Lake Tanganyika, in what is now called Tanzania. And when the British authorities refused to let a young, untrained girl venture into the wilds of Africa on her own, who should volunteer to accompany me for the first three months but my own amazing mother.

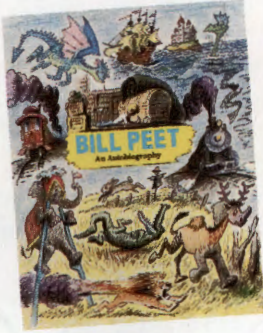
And so my work began. After several years in Africa I returned to England to work for my Ph.D. in ethology from Cambridge University, and then I returned to the paradise of Gombe Stream, Tanzania, to continue my research.



**Louis Leakey
(1903-1972)**



Goodall extends a hand to a young chimpanzee named Flint.



Before becoming a children's author and illustrator, Bill Peet worked as an animator at Walt Disney Studios. In this excerpt, Peet has just arrived in Los Angeles. His fiancée, Margaret, is back in Indiana. Peet's hope for a job rests on a letter from Disney inviting him to participate in a tryout.

BILL PEET: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The Disney Studios were closed in by a high cement wall, and the only view was through the wrought-iron front gate. What I could see of the complex looked most inviting. There was a flagstone walk across a grass courtyard to an archway in front of what appeared to be the main building — a quaint, cozy look appropriate for a company dealing with fun and fantasy.



Just a block from the studios I ran across a rooming house, a big barn of a place with the second floor and the attic sectioned off into narrow compartments with a small cot in each one. The landlady was a little mouse of a woman who explained apologetically that the two dollars a week rent need not be paid until I could afford it.



Her tenants were mostly Disney beginners or else newcomers like me who had no guarantee of a job. That dear little lady, Mrs. Beson, was well aware of our situation, and no doubt she had seen many come and go who could never pay the rent.

The next morning at the appointed time of nine o'clock I was at the Disney front gate. It was the wrong place. I was told to check in at a one-story stucco building across the street called the Disney Annex. The tryout group had already lined up at the front door to sign in, and I was the last of the fifteen to arrive.

Most of them were fresh out of art school as I was, and they came from all parts of the country in response to the special delivery letter, not knowing what to expect.

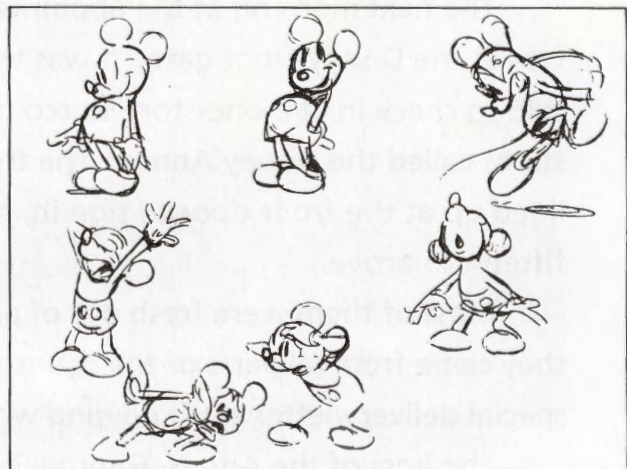
The boss of the Annex, George Drake, was a tall, scrawny fellow with a shock of rusty hair and extremely large ears.

He started things off with a stern lecture warning us that the one-month tryout would be no bed of roses. And more than once he reminded us how fortunate we were to get an opportunity to work for Disney. "There are plenty of people waiting out on the street to get a job here" was his last warning.

After the lecture we were given model sheets, guides to drawing Mickey, Donald, and Goofy so we could practice the roundish Disney drawing style. During that one-month period Drake kept us on edge by continually pacing the hall and popping in on us at odd moments. Every few days one or two of the group were let go, and as it came down to the last week we wondered if Drake would fire all of us. I was warned many times about leaving the buttons off of Mickey's pants, but even so I was one of the three survivors at the end of the month.

We were put to work as in-betweeners, with the tedious, painstaking job of adding hundreds of drawings in between hundreds of other drawings to move Donald or Mickey from here to there.

It was a matter of enduring the job with the hope of making it to the promised land across the street where big

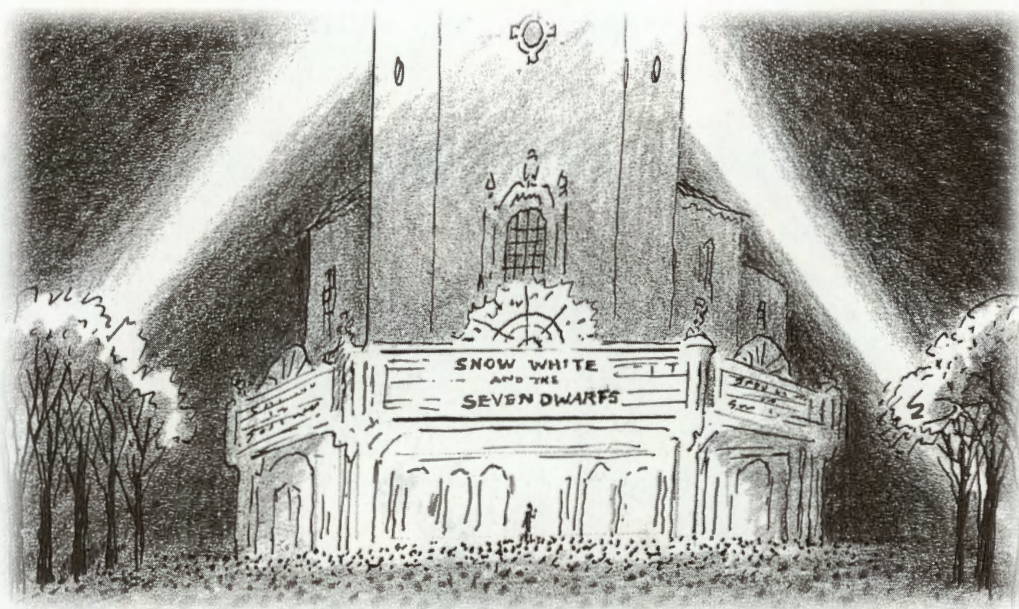




exciting things were going on. They were making *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the very first feature-length animated film.

I wrote to Margaret immediately to let her know I made it through the tryouts and was on the job. And even though it was assembly-line work there would be all kinds of opportunities if *Snow White* was a success.

I didn't mention all the dire predictions coming from Hollywood bigwigs and movie columnists. They called *Snow White* Disney's Folly. The picture would be a box-office flop! People would never sit through a full-length cartoon feature! Disney was getting too big for his britches! And so on.



Those ominous predictions made me wonder if I had arrived just in time to board the Disney *Titanic*. And I'm sure those voices of doom haunted the people working with a frenzy to complete *Snow White* in time for the grand première before Christmas. I even got in on the last-minute effort, working nights tracing dwarves on something called a rotoscope machine.

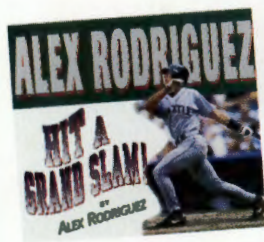
Margaret came out on the train the last week of November and we were married on the thirtieth, then moved into a dingy little apartment about a half-hour walk from the studio. A few weeks later, we attended the gala première of *Snow White*. All Disney employees and their wives or husbands were invited, along with hundreds of special guests and newspeople. As we moved through the mob toward the marquee of the Carthay Circle Theater, I caught my first glimpse of Walt Disney. He was addressing the crowd from a podium, but his voice was lost in all the hubbub.

Very few people who worked on the film had seen it all in one piece, so it was a new experience for most of the audience. Of course the overwhelming success of *Snow White* is motion picture history, and as I write about it now, it is out in the theaters for the seventh time, having celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1987.

I believe everyone in that first *Snow White* audience could have predicted the enormous success of the film. They were carried away by the picture from the very beginning, and as it went along everyone was bubbling over with enthusiasm and frequently bursting into spontaneous applause. At the end, the audience exploded into a thunderous ovation — and the voices of doom were silenced for good.



In this selection, athlete Alex Rodriguez tells about an important period in his career, his first two years in professional baseball with the Seattle Mariners organization.



Hit a Grand Slam!

by **Alex Rodriguez**



My first spring training opened my eyes to how hard pro athletes work. The posted time for practice was ten o'clock in the morning. Every day for a month I showed up at 9:30, figuring being early would show my dedication. One day I decided to arrive at 7:00 A.M. I walked in and saw a few guys already in the clubhouse.

I turned the corner into the weight room and saw second baseman Joey Cora pumping iron. I then went to the batting cage and found two-time batting champion Edgar Martinez hitting off a batting tee into a net.

"Edgar, what are you doing here so early?"

"I have to hit. I have to work!"

Most guys would go home at about two o'clock in the afternoon. One day I forgot my pager. I returned to the clubhouse and found Edgar in the batting cage at 6:00 P.M. Those veterans showed me that success in anything begins with dedication and hard work. I met NBA coach Pat Riley recently, and he told me a key to success is enjoying your sweat. That means you have to find joy in practice and working out to reach your highest athletic potential.

I started my first season at the bottom of the Mariners' minor leagues with Wisconsin's Class A Appleton Foxes. Players tell horror stories about the minor leagues, but playing in Appleton gave me cherished memories.

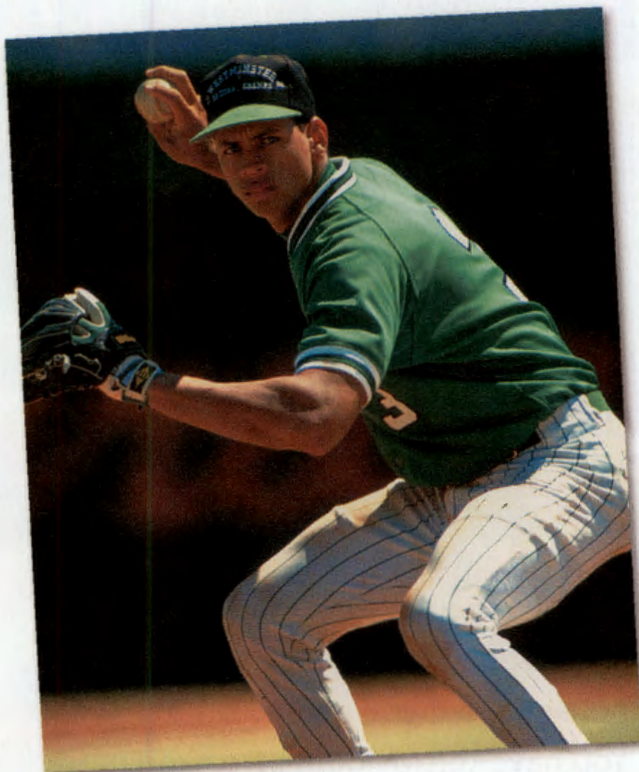


The town embraced me with a welcoming hug.

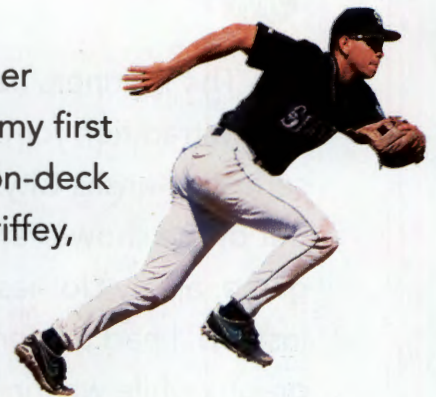
Within two months, I moved up to Class AA at Jacksonville. Three weeks later, I got the call to join the big-league team, that week playing in Boston.

I stayed up late calling family, friends, and old coaches — "I'm going to the show!"

At 18, I became the youngest Major League player in a decade. The lights, reporters, and crowds were unbelievable.



I remember preparing for my first at-bat in the on-deck circle. Ken Griffey, Jr. walked by and said: "It's showtime."



My body felt jittery, and my knees buckled. I could barely stand. I went hitless in three tries that first night, but I had a solid fielding night.

The next night I broke out with two hits. Still, I was nervous for days. I didn't want to make a mistake. I arrived early at the ballpark, hoping not to be noticed.

After 26 days, the Mariners sent me down to their Class AAA team in Calgary, Canada. That gave me the rare glimpse of playing in all four pro levels in one season.

I started the 1995 season with the Tacoma Rainiers, the M's new Class AAA affiliate. The 31-mile trip between Tacoma and Seattle became all too familiar. I was called up to Seattle on May 6th and stayed 21 days, enduring the rookie razzing.



The Mariners have a special rookie tradition for the team's first series in Kansas City. When I got out of the shower after the last game, all my clothes were gone. Instead, I had to sign 30 autographs while wearing a silver dress and balancing in high-heeled shoes. If that wasn't bad enough, I had to wear them on the flight home and listen to all the teasing jokes. I laughed along with them.

Much of that season was no laughing matter to me. I became a human yo-yo going between Tacoma and Seattle. Three times the M's sent me back to Tacoma. Each demotion chipped away at me. The last time, in mid-August, I sat at my Seattle locker with my head down, in tears. I felt drained, defeated.

"Come on, relax, you're going to get through this," teammates said.

Hurt and angry, I seriously thought about driving back to Miami. Instead, I called Mom.

"Forget them. I hate them all. I don't want to be here. I'm coming home," I said.



"No you're not!" Mom answered. "You don't have a house here if you come home. You have to stay out there. You are GOING TO MAKE IT!"

Wanting to quit during tough times is natural. There are times you should quit and try something else. But quitting out of frustration is rarely the right time. I'm so thankful Mom talked me out of it. I know now the adversity made me stronger.

If I had quit, I would have missed the Mariners' remarkable "Refuse To Lose" playoff run. In August, Seattle trailed California by 13 games. A magical string of victories closed the gap as I rejoined the team August 31st.

The playoff race excited me as much as the guys playing.

I saw it as a learning experience. I prepared myself each day to play. I paid attention to every detail, as if my life depended on it.

The season ended with us tied with California. We won the one-game playoff in dramatic fashion for the M's first-ever playoff spot.



I hit three times in the hard-fought playoff series against New York. What a thrill! What I'll remember most, though, is being on-deck in the roaring Kingdome when Edgar drove home Junior in the 11th inning to beat New York 6-5 in the deciding division playoff game. That's the best feeling I've had in baseball. There's nothing like winning. The same could be said for losing.

Cleveland dashed our World Series visions 4-2 in the American League Championship Series.

With the season-ending loss at the Kingdome, Seattle fans gave us a thunderous moving ovation after the game to show their thanks for the season's incredible ride.



Narrating

Write a Chapter of Your Autobiography

You've read a few examples of autobiography. Now write a chapter from your own autobiography. Focus on a time or event in your life that has been important to you.

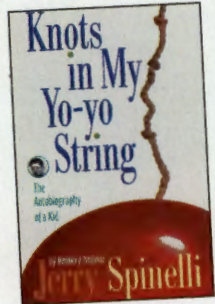
Choose something that you think other people would be interested in reading about.



Tips

- Before beginning, try to remember as much about your topic as you can. Write down things that you think would make interesting reading.
- Be specific when choosing a topic. Think about how you will begin and end your chapter.
- Provide details for your readers. People and places that are familiar to you will not necessarily be to them.

Read On Your Own



Knots in My Yo Yo String: The Autobiography of a Kid

by Jerry Spinelli (Knopf)

Black-and-white family photos accompany Spinelli's recollections of his childhood.

The Abracadabra Kid

by Sid Fleischman (Greenwillow)

In his witty autobiography, Sid Fleischman includes tips for young writers.



The Moon and I

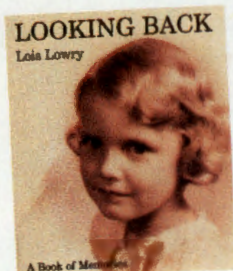
by Betsy Byars (Simon)

Byars recalls family anecdotes and fun with her pet blacksnake, Moon.

Boy: Tales of Childhood

by Roald Dahl (Puffin)

Dahl's childhood in England and Norway influenced his later writing.



Looking Back: A Book of Memories

by Lois Lowry (Houghton)

Lowry recalls childhood memories as well as experiences from her adult years.