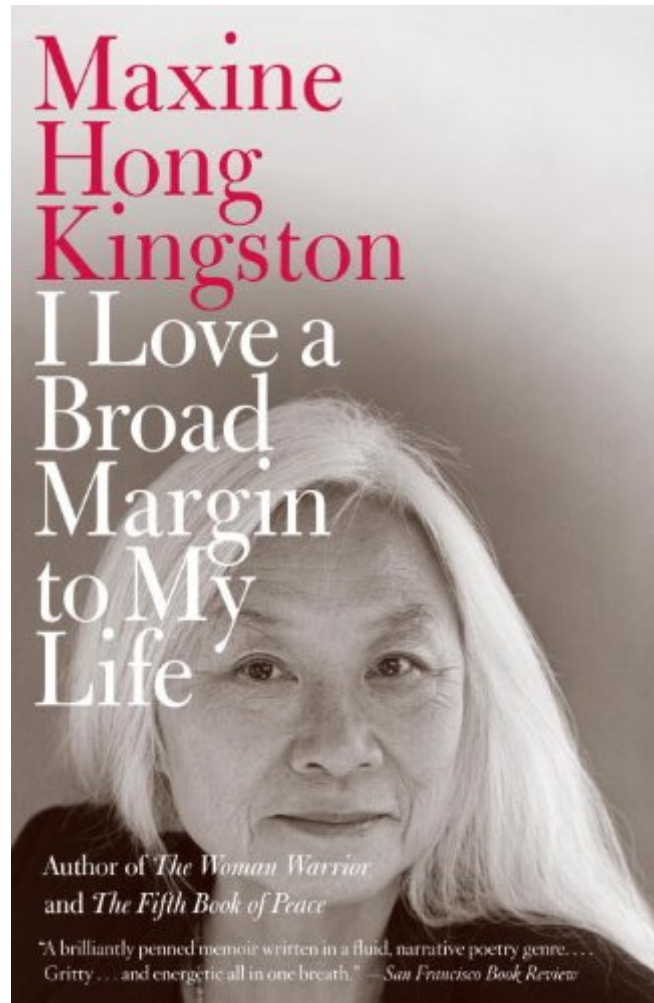


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I Love A Broad Margin To My Life (Vintage International)



Synopsis

In her singular voice—humble, elegiac, practical—Maxine Hong Kingston sets out to reflect on aging as she turns sixty-five. Kingston's swift, effortlessly flowing verse lines feel instantly natural in this fresh approach to the art of memoir, as she circles from present to past and back, from lunch with a writer friend to the funeral of a Vietnam veteran, from her long marriage (and divorce until we get it right. / Love, that is. Get love right) to her arrest at a peace march in Washington, where she and her "sisters" protested the Iraq war in the George W. Bush years. Kingston embraces Thoreau's notion of a broad margin, hoping to expand her vista: "I'm standing on top of a hill; / I can see everywhichway" / the long way that I came, and the few / places I have yet to go. Treat / my whole life as if it were a day. On her journeys as writer, peace activist, teacher, and mother, Kingston revisits her most beloved characters: she learns the final fate of her Woman Warrior, and she takes her Tripmaster Monkey, a hip Chinese American, on a journey through China, where he has never been—a trip that becomes a beautiful meditation on the country then and now, on a culture where rice farmers still work in the age-old way, even as a new era is dawning. "All over China," she writes, "and places where Chinese are, populations / are on the move, going home. That home / where Mother and Father are buried. Doors / between heaven and earth open wide." Such is the spirit of this wonderful book—a sense of doors opening wide onto an American life of great purpose and joy, and the tonic wisdom of a writer we have come to cherish. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

File Size: 950 KB

Print Length: 241 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (January 18, 2011)

Publication Date: January 18, 2011

Sold by: Random House LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B004C43FYI

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #881,543 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #16
in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > American > Asian American
#120 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > United States > Asian
American #613 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Chinese

Customer Reviews

Several years ago, Maxine Hong Kingston's previous biographical book with an attached fictional chapter, *The Fifth Book of Peace* was my favorite of the year and I suggested it to everyone I met. The book, *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life*, is nearly a follow up work about what happens next as she continues her life journey. It meanders like a large river covering any range of topics giving little gems of subtle ways of thinking about a thing in a new way. It moves fluidly through time with discussions of multiple generations in her family with the central theme about her own upcoming 65th birthday. One of the charms about the book is the feel of poetry, from the staccato sentence structure, abrupt turn of direction, and the choice to use whatever language best conveys the completion of the thought. It's next to impossible to imagine what's going to happen next and relaxing that part of your brain to just follow the story is a peaceful way to take a break from the day.

Hong Kingston's memoir is deeply inspiring. It shows how being an agent of change and being dedicated to creating a better world is a complex process. What I take away from her story is that peace is not a final state but a process; we have to enact peace in our communities in a collective effort. Her writing is brilliant.

I read this book in one sitting. I had a hard time putting it down, and found myself not wanting to be interrupted by phone calls, or the vagaries of living. A memoir of reflections on her life as she faces her 65th birthday, the book travels to China, to Washington DC where she was arrested, to the fire that destroyed her home years ago. This is a gentle book, an inspiring book. Often, when I read such a book, especially as well written as this one, I thrill for having read it, and despair of ever writing anything again. This book has inspired me to write my own memoir as I face my 72d birthday coming sooner than expected ;-)
I Love a Broad Margin to My Life is a free verse poem, filled with music as she writes about her life, where she's been, what she's done, the whys, and the wherefores. There are many tidbits of fun and useful information scattered freely throughout. Did you know the meaning of the word karma is work, not doom? She lists reasons to live and take joy in life. If you are a reader of Thoreau, as she is, you will recognize the title as a line from one of his

books. The saying hangs over her desk. It will soon hang over mine, and this book will always be close to my hand, and bound within my heart. I am not sure what Thoreau meant when he wrote that line, or what MH Kinston meant when she adopted it, let alone what a 'broad margin to my life' means to you, but to me, it means to surround myself with space to think, to write, to create, to quilt, to learn, to be, to live. Thank you, Ms. Kingston for showing the way.

A lovely work. Just what anyone familiar with her books would expect of this skillful and original writer. Highly recommended reading for any day of the week.

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