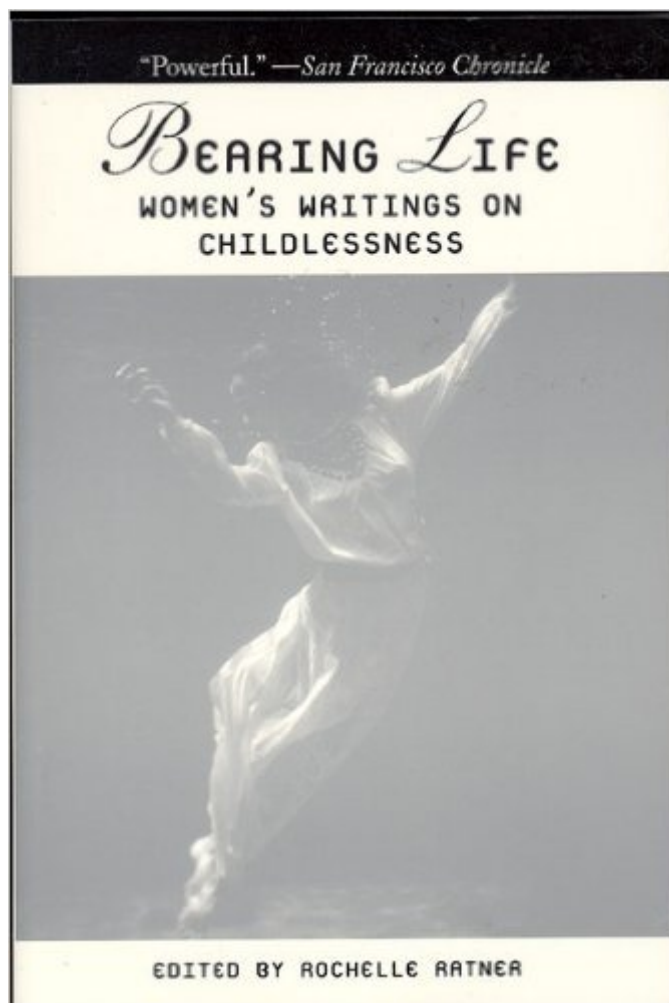


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# Bearing Life: Women's Writings On Childlessness



## Synopsis

A wall of silence surrounds the experience of women who are childless, whether by choice or by circumstance. *Bearing Life* is the first anthology to marshal the power of literature to break this silence. Here, more than forty contemporary writers reflect candidly and movingly on what it means to live as women without children. These stories, poems, and personal essays speak directly from—and to—the conflicting, often painful, and sometimes liberating emotions of childless women. The selections move through the ambivalence and denial childless women confront within themselves, to the misunderstanding and hostility they confront in the outside world, toward a space where an acceptance and even celebration of childlessness can begin to take place. *Bearing Life* includes work by Julia Alvarez, Margaret Atwood, Rita Mae Brown, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Diane diPrima, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Janice Eidus, Daniela Gioseffi, Amy Hempel, Linda Hogan, bell hooks, Hettie Jones, Irena Klepfisz, Joy Kogawa, Valerie Miner, Kathleen Norris, Naomi Shihab Nye, Joyce Carol Oates, Grace Paley, Molly Peacock, Marge Piercy, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Evelyn C. Rosser, Jane Rule, May Sarton, Sandra Scofield, Amy Tan, Luci Tapahonso, and many others.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was extremely disappointed in this book -- a large percentage of the stories/articles are about women who have or had children. It is deceptive and inappropriate to have stories about/from women who lost or were losing their children (for various reasons) to be included in a book about

childlessness. Even the clip from Amy Tan, one of my favorite authors, seemed to miss the mark on this topic. There also seems to be an inordinately large percentage of the articles written by lesbians, and how being a lesbian was so intertwined with why they didn't want kids -- as if women who choose not to have children are possibly all latent homosexuals. Furthermore, many of the stories focus on women who are dysfunctional -- furthering the myth that women without kids are 'damaged' as an explanation for why they don't want children, like a 'normal' woman. There was one particular article which I found interesting -- about the author's fear of becoming a bag lady because she has no children to care for her, while also acknowledging the fact that having children is no guarantee that sad fate will not occur. Separating content from creativity, I also think that most of the stories and poems were poorly written. I might have enjoyed this more if the writing were beautiful, or insightful, or artistically significant, even if the topic was not what I expected. I have read several books about childless/childfree-ness, and this is the worst on the topic in every way.

This ambitious anthology includes poignant memoirs, essays, poems, and excerpts from longer works. It is unified by its subject: childlessness, from the point of view (for the most part) of contemporary American women who, for various reasons, are without children. This is, we learn, no small thing. The book is in three sections, "Facing Choice," "Knowing Loss," and finally, "Bearing Life." Some of the writers are troubled, or grieving; some (Amy Hempel) are acidly funny, and many are coping with daughterhood, rather than motherhood. There are childhood diary entries, bitter memories, and great tenderness. The variety of experience in this anthology makes it an admirable and moving collection.

I have been searching for books on the topic of childlessness for sometime now & have not been terribly successful. This book spoke to me on so many levels that I can not begin to convey the impact. As a married woman in a Big Family it has been a struggle to remain childless in many ways. I have my moments of clarity & moments of emotional disaster & that is what made this book so powerful... The stories & poems carry the full range of emotions that we all experience somewhere along the line. If you are a member of this exclusive club you owe it to yourself to read this book & see clearly that you are not alone. I loved this book so much I have given it as a gift. Read it & you will not regret it.-hefc

Despite this book's jacket blurb announcing it's about women who are childless by choice or by circumstance, it's pretty much entirely written by and for women who are childless by choice. What's

more, many are positively hostile to those who are childless through infertility. The essay by Joy Williams is a case in point: she declares all people who want children selfish -- especially selfish if (like 95% of Americans) they want children, even though they have a medical problem that prevents pregnancy, and even selfish if they choose to adopt. Despite spending a decade battling infertility and ending up with two children, I happen to believe that not having children is a perfectly legitimate choice for many people, and would never characterize them as selfish for making that choice. (That's WHY it's a choice, right?) And I understand that this book partly represents a backlash against the traditionalist notion that women who don't want to be mothers are selfish. But the result is extraordinarily hostile to parents and especially people who are childless without having chosen to be so. In fact, this book makes women who chose to live child-free sound like a much nastier group than I have ever found them to be in real life. It does them no service, believe me.

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