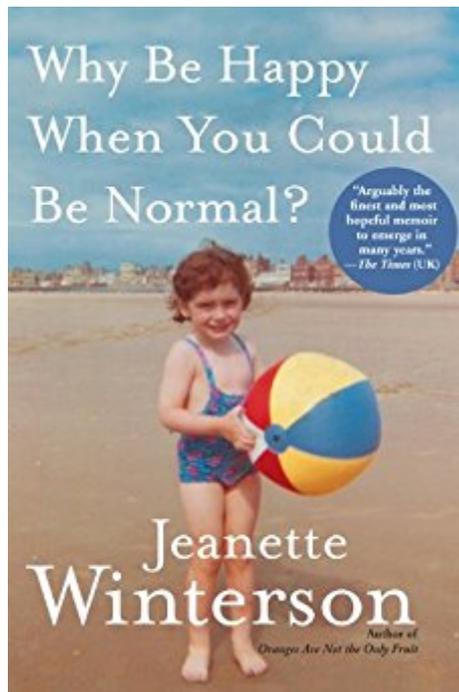


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# Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?



## Synopsis

Jeanette Winterson's novels have established her as a major figure in world literature. She has written some of the most admired books of the past few decades, including her internationally bestselling first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the story of a young girl adopted by Pentecostal parents that is now often required reading in contemporary fiction. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* is a memoir about a life's work to find happiness. It's a book full of stories: about a girl locked out of her home, sitting on the doorstep all night; about a religious zealot disguised as a mother who has two sets of false teeth and a revolver in the dresser, waiting for Armageddon; about growing up in a north England industrial town now changed beyond recognition; about the Universe as Cosmic Dustbin. It is the story of how a painful past that Jeanette thought she'd written over and repainted rose to haunt her, sending her on a journey into madness and out again, in search of her biological mother. Witty, acute, fierce, and celebratory, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* is a tough-minded search for belonging; for love, identity, home, and a mother.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the October 28th Guardian, Jeanette has an essay which retells the opening of *Why Be Happy When You Could be Normal?* The retelling is as riveting as the original. In essay and book, Winterson portrays herself as a survivor. Her childhood reads like the darker parts of some Grimms fairytale, even if her telling of the story is often lightened by empathy. Here, for instance, is a description of her often abusive, book-burning, adoptive mother. "She filled the phone box. She was out of scale, larger than life. She was like a fairy story where size is approximate and unstable. She loomed up. She expanded. Only later, much later, too late, did I understand how small she was to herself. The baby nobody picked up. The uncarried child still inside her." A later passage reads: "Babies are frightening - raw tyrants whose only kingdom is their own body. My new mother had a lot of problems with the body - her own, my dad's, their bodies together, and mine. She had muffled her own body in flesh and clothes, suppressed its appetites with a fearful mixture of nicotine and Jesus, dosed it with purgatives that made her vomit, submitted it to doctors, who administered enemas and pelvic rings, subdued its desires for ordinary touch and comfort. Then suddenly, not out of her own body, and with no preparation, she had a thing that was all body. A burping, vomiting, sprawling faecal thing blasting the house with rude life." Jeanette makes it hard not to feel some sympathy, even for twisted Mrs. Winterson. Like many patemoirs, Winterson's matremoir is as much about the power of storytelling as it is about the parent.

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