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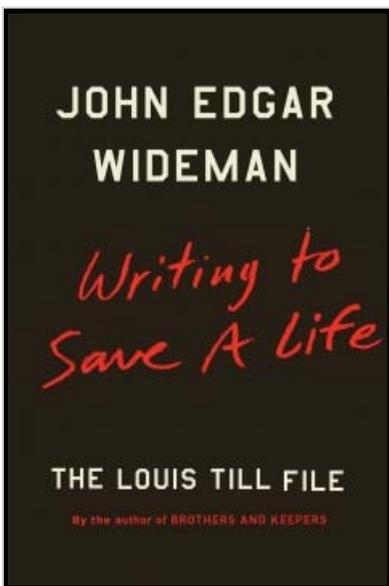


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## Writing to Save a Life

The Louis Till File

by John Edgar Wideman

Price: \$25.00 (Hardcover)

Published: November 15, 2016



Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

**From the Publisher:** An award-winning writer traces the life of the father of iconic Civil Rights martyr Emmett Till—a man who was executed by the Army ten years before Emmett's murder. An evocative and personal exploration of individual and collective memory in America by one of the most formidable Black intellectuals of our time. In 1955, Emmett Till, aged fourteen, traveled from his home in Chicago to visit family in Mississippi. Several weeks later he returned, dead; allegedly he whistled at a white woman. His mother, Mamie, wanted the world to see what had been done to her son. She chose to leave his casket open. Images of her brutalized boy were published widely. While Emmett's story is known, there's a dark side note that's rarely mentioned. Ten years earlier, Emmett's father was executed by the Army for rape and murder. In *Writing to Save a Life*, John Edgar Wideman searches...

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### About The Author

John Edgar Wideman

John Edgar Wideman's books include *Writing to Save a Life*, *Philadelphia Fire*, *Brothers and Keepers*, *Fatheralong*, *Hoop Dreams*, and *Sent for You Yesterday*. He is a MacArthur Fellow and has won the PEN/Faulkner Award twice and has been a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle...

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### What We Say

"Writing To Save A Life" is a book. It's not exactly a novel or a memoir or a history or a travelogue or a biography or an essay. But it uses elements of all these forms and more to accomplish exactly what writer John Edgar Wideman sets out to accomplish at each and every stage. Subtitled "The Louis Till File," it uses the story of Emmett Till (the 14 year old boy brutally murdered in the Deep South) and Wideman's own memory of seeing a famous photo of Emmett in "Jet" magazine when he too was 14 years old to launch into his narrative. It quickly centers on Emmett's father Louis Till, a man executed by the US military during WWII for the crime of murder and rape or perhaps just rape or maybe just the theft of sugar and

for being the wrong colored skin at the wrong place at the wrong time. Wideman embraces the idea of lost fathers and lost sons, tells of his own disappearing dad and his own childhood, always circling back to Louis Till and Emmett Till, diving deep into the meaning of those crushed lives and then coming up, gasping for air. Wideman quotes newspaper accounts about the trial of Emmett's murderers, reads and re-reads military documents obtained via the Freedom Of Information Act, makes up inner monologues for Louis and his wife, and then even Wideman's own mother and father. He mixes in the story of how Wideman lost his virginity on a couch to a girl visiting from Harlem, describes traveling to France to visit Louis Till's grave in an isolated spot set aside for the dishonorable dead, and then travels down south to his family's roots. Wideman explores why he never traveled there as a boy with his grandfather -- despite repeated offers -- perhaps because of fear or shame or the simple indifference of youth. This vivid, hard to shake book ponders injustice and examines conscience, turning the life of Louis Till this way and that, looking for messages and meaning and accepting finally the same silence Louis offered to the military investigators who Till knew all too well had already made up their minds as to what would happen to him whether he was guilty or not, so what was the point in talking? All stories are true. Wideman quotes an Igbo proverb, and that's as true here as anywhere, whether the form of that story is a book that can be neatly slotted into memoir or essay or history or whether it selfishly slides this way and that across genre and style, gobbling up forms and tossing them aside to tell a story that needed to be told of a writer wrestling with race. -- Michael Giltz

## What Others Say

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"In his long awaited new book, *Writing to Save a Life*, John Edgar Wideman tells the largely forgotten story of Louis Till, a man of color who suffered a miscarriage of racial justice a full decade before the infamous lynching of his son Emmett. Wideman pens a powerful blend of fact and fiction, riffing on concerns and themes that he has explored for a half century now in his highly distinguished body of prose. These pages represent a wise and wonderful achievement, both timely and timeless." —Jeffery Renard Allen, author of the novels *Song of the Shank* and *Rails Under My Back* -

"John Edgar Wideman's *Writing to Save a Life: The Louis Till File* excavates the forgotten prequel to a brutal chapter in the ongoing history of American racial injustice. Wideman examines a particular narrative—the way a father's death was exhumed to justify his son's murderers going free—in order to question the terms of narrative itself, refusing to mistake silence for significance, absence for presence, or history for truth. I read this provocative and surprising book in the wake of the murders of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, and it felt utterly...

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