



Nola: A Memoir of Faith, Art, and Madness

Robin Hemley

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The evidence at hand: an autobiography—complete with their mother’s edits—written by his brilliant and disturbingly religious sister; a story featuring actual childhood events, but published by his mother as fiction; the transcript of a hypnotherapy session from his adolescence; and perjured court documents hidden in a drawer for decades. These are the clues Robin Hemley gathers when he sets out to reconstruct the life of his older sister Nola, who died at the age of twenty-five after several years of treatment for schizophrenia. Armed with these types of clues, Hemley quickly discovers that finding the truth in any life—even one’s own—is a fragmented and complex task.

Nola: A Memoir of Faith, Art, and Madness is much more than a remembrance of a young woman who was consumed her entire life by a passion for finding and understanding God; it is also a quest to understand what people choose to reveal and conceal, and an examination of the enormous toll mental illness takes on a family. Finally, it is a revelation of the alchemy that creates a writer: confidence in the unknowable, distrust of the proven, tortuous devotion to the fine print in life, and sacrifice to writing itself as it plays the roles of confessor, scourge, and creator.

Upon its first release in 1998, *Nola* won *ForeWord*’s Book of the Year Award for biography/memoir, the Washington State Book Award for biography/memoir, and the Independent Press Book Award for autobiography/memoir.

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