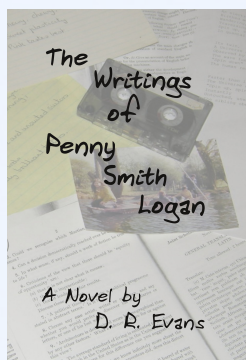




# ENGINE HOUSE BOOKS

## BOOK BITS #5



### ***THE WRITINGS OF PENNY SMITH LOGAN*** by **D. R. Evans**

*THE WRITINGS OF PENNY SMITH LOGAN* IS  
AVAILABLE IN A RETAIL EDITION  
(ISBN 978-1-936211-00-5) AND IN AN  
ECONOMY EDITION.

EHB: Tell us a bit about *The Writings of Penny Smith Logan* (hereinafter called simply *Writings*).

DRE: Although this was the third book I wrote, it was the one that I had wanted to write from the beginning. But it seemed more sensible to start with one or two books in more popular genres rather than to tackle a serious literary novel first.

EHB: Was *Writings* harder to write than your first two books?

DRE: Yes. The first two books were plot-driven stories, so the principal difficulties were in characterization and making the events fit together so as to make plausible stories. *Writings* essentially has no plot, which you might think would make things easier, but in fact made the task of keeping the book moving much more difficult. But the hardest part about *Writings* was that it's a first-person narrative by a female poet. I am neither female nor a poet. So that made it a real challenge. So did trying to make it honest.

EHB: You say that *Writings* has no plot. Is that really true?

DRE: When I say that it has no plot, I mean that it has no plot in the ordinary sense of events meshing together into a coherent beginning, middle and end to make a single story. However, it does tell a story on multiple levels, in much the way a biography -- or, more particularly, an autobiography -- tells a story.

EHB: So do you think that *Writings* is a difficult book for the reader?

DRE: I hope not, and I don't think it is, not at all. It's the story of one woman's life, and I think that most people can identify with at least some of the events that happen to Penny. We've all experienced success, failure, love, loss and betrayal to some extent. That's really what the books is all about: how one woman reacts to the events that fill her life, which are really no different from the events in all our lives.

EHB: You say that it was a challenge to make the book honest. What do you mean by that?

DRE: Since the book is supposed to be extracts from a private journal that was never intended to be read by anyone other than the author, it was ultimately vital to remain faithful to Penny's persona. That meant being willing to



include what Penny really thought about things, instead of watering some of the scenes and issues that confronted her in order to make them more palatable or easier for readers.

EHB: Some of the action takes place in Oxford, and some in Boulder. You have lived in both places. So how much of the book is autobiographical?

DRE: Action also occurs in places I have not lived, and in some places that are completely fictitious. I can think of only one scene that closely mirrors a real experience from my life. A very few scenes are (very) loosely based on events that have happened to me. The vast majority of the book has no counterpart in my life.

EHB: A similar question: how much does Penny's persona reflect your own?

DRE. Not at all, as far as I can tell. Actually, if I can expand on that for a moment, maybe that's part of what made writing the book particularly interesting to me: Penny's head is very different from my own, and I had to describe what Penny thought about things, not what I would have thought in the same circumstances.

EHB: So why did you write this book?

DRE: Partly because I think it's an interesting story, told from a unique perspective. Partly, as I suggested earlier, because it was a challenge.

EHB: *Writings* is quite a bit longer than your other books.

DRE: True, but it's much shorter than it was in early drafts. The final version is only a little more than half the length of some drafts.

EHB: So you cut many scenes?

DRE: Yes. I severely truncated three threads: Penny's spiritual efforts to understand life --

which I decided would not interest most readers; the philosophical implications surrounding Richard's work -- which I felt were too complex for a novel that was supposed to be read for entertainment; and a lot more detail about Sam, which just seemed unnecessary.

EHB: Anything you'd change about the book if you had the chance?

DRE: I would probably remove the scene at the concert in London. That scene was intended to show that music was important to Penny, and also that she didn't really know her husband very well; but it ended up being isolated and rather out of place. I was undecided whether to keep it in, and ultimately I think that to do so was a mistake.

EHB: To conclude, can you tell us three factoids about *Writings*?

DRE: One: Aloysius was the name of the teddy bear in *Bridehead Revisited*.

Two: The fictional town of Friggens is named after the writer Paul Friggens.

Three: Maps on the University of Colorado campus really did used to be called "Campus Locator Guides".

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