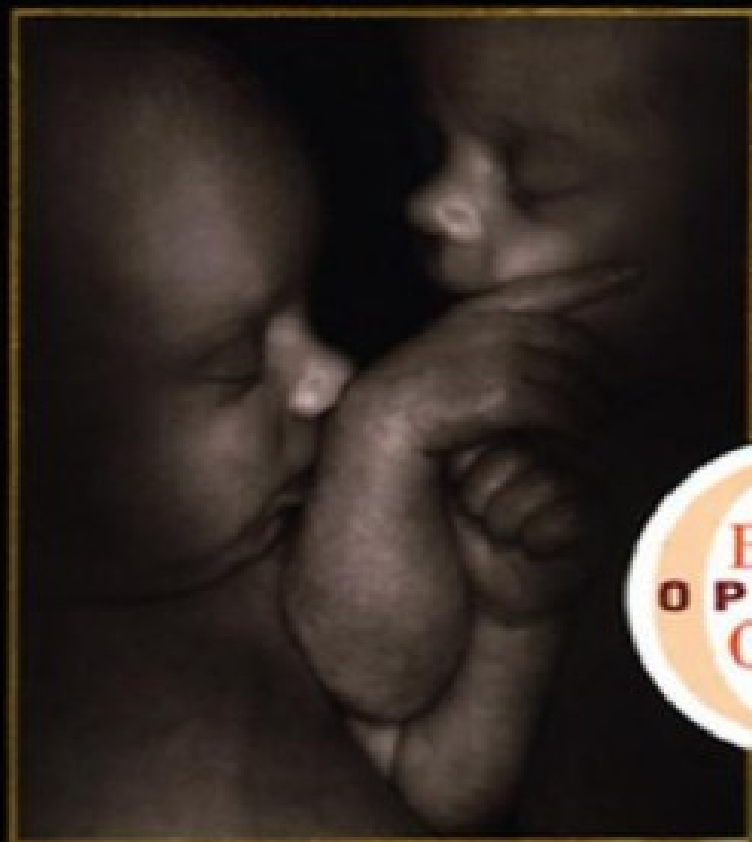


#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

I KNOW THIS
MUCH IS TRUE



WALLY
LAMB

A Novel by the Author of SHE'S COME UNDONE

I KNOW THIS MUCH
IS TRUE



WALLY LAMB

 HarperCollins e-books

This book is for my father and my sons

In ways I don't fully understand, this story is connected to the lives and deaths of the following: Christopher Biase, Elizabeth Cobb, Randy Deglin, Samantha Deglin, Kathy Levesque, Nicholas Spano, and Patrick Vitagliano. I hope that, in some small way, the novel honors both their memory and the devotion and strength of the loved ones they had to leave.

Contents

HarperCollins e-book extra: [Who Is Wally Lamb?](#) The author addresses the National Endowment for the Arts.

- [1](#) On the afternoon of October 12, 1990. . .
- [2](#) One Saturday morning. . .
- [3](#) When you're the sane brother. . .
- [4](#) The maximum-security Hatch. . .
- [5](#) Thomas and I are going. . .
- [6](#) I read the note. . .
- [7](#) Thomas and I meander. . .
- [8](#) When my brother and I graduated. . .
- [9](#) "Come in, come in. . ."
- [10](#) Thomas and I have been to three. . .
- [11](#) It was musical chairs and months-old. . .
- [12](#) Any sane man would have. . .

- [13](#) The Indian cemetery that abuts the sprawling. . .
- [14](#) Dr. Patel had warned me she might. . .
- [15](#) “Hold these, please,” Dr. Patel said, handing. . .
- [16](#) Ma was thrilled to have us back home. . .
- [17](#) “Mr. Birdsey, tell me about your stepfather.”. . .
- [18](#) The summer Thomas and I worked. . .
- [19](#) Dell Weeks never drank before noon. . .
- [20](#) Ray jerked my brother around. . .
- [21](#) It was after two the next afternoon. . .
- [22](#) I was outside in front, waiting. . .
- [23](#) When my stepfather warned me not. . .
- [24](#) The next day, Dessa and I drove out. . .
- [25](#) “Almond, peanut butter, or crunch?”
- [26](#) Beep!
- [27](#) The thump outside woke me up.
- [28](#) GOD BLESS AMERICA!
- [29](#) Leo approached my stepfather, holding. . .
- [30](#) “*Carry the corpse,*” *the monkey says.*

- [31](#) The History of Domenico Onofrio Tempesta,. . .
- [32](#) Rain drummed against the car roof.
- [33](#) The hellish voyage aboard the *SS Napolitano*. . .
- [34](#) Dr. Patel said it was lovely to see me again.
- [35](#) For two nights now, no sleep.
- [36](#) “So he drags her to the bridge, shoves her. . .
- [37](#) I left *Signora* Siragusa’s boardinghouse. . .
- [38](#) I closed the door on the pounding rain, the wind.
- [39](#) That was the night the Monkey told me. . .
- [40](#) Sheffer was late, as usual.
- [41](#) My wife and I never discussed. . .
- [42](#) Ray and I sat side by side in the. . .
- [43](#) After that victorious banquet. . .
- [44](#) I spent the next several weeks tying up. . .
- [45](#) And so, by digging that poor. . .
- [46](#) *Thomas and I float below the Falls, easing*. . .
- [47](#) Leo’s racquet scooped low for the shot.
- [48](#) There’s more, of course.

[Acknowledgments](#)

[A List of Sources Consulted](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Wally Lamb](#)

[Credits](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)



[Who Is Wally Lamb?](#)

Wally Lamb, recipient of an NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, addressed the National Council on the Arts on November 2, 2001.

I didn't start writing short stories until 1981, the year I was thirty, but I believe the seeds for my fiction writer's life may have been planted way back in 1961, the year I was ten. JFK had just been inaugurated, Dion and the Belmonts were belting out "Runaround Sue," and I was a public school student growing up in blue-collar Norwich, Connecticut. As such, I was required by my Italian-Catholic mother to attend catechism class at St. Patrick's Parochial School each Wednesday, which was where I had a close encounter with Sister Mercy.

This was, of course, the baby boomer era, and so, after spending the long school day with thirty-four or thirty-five parochial school students, the last thing Sister Mercy wanted to do on Wednesday afternoons at 3:30 was welcome into her midst thirty-six or thirty-seven rowdy public school students. We were equally unhappy to be there and so there was acting out, answering back. Some of us were exiled to the cloakroom. Then, at 4:29 p.m. we would all thank God for His mercy and hold our collective breath.

The old school clock on the wall in Sister's room was the type that measured time both visually and audibly. As the minute hand would prepare to move toward the magical moment of 4:30, it would first lunge back a bit, then thrust forward with a *ca-chunk, ca-chunk*. "Class . . . dismissed!" Sister would announce and we would thunder toward the door and pound down the stairs as if the Good Humor man was waiting outside on the sidewalk with free samples.

Now, I was much too big a scaredy cat to be a troublemaker in Sister's class; my m.o. for survival was to sit in back, say nothing, and try as best I could to blend into the wainscoting. But on the afternoon I became a fiction writer, I got a strange urge. I wanted Sister Mercy to like me. Or, if she couldn't like me, then at least to be aware that I existed. And so, on that day, when the minute hand lurched first backward, then forward, *ca-chunk, ca-chunk*, and Sister intoned those liberating words, "Class . . . dismissed!" and my peers scrambled toward the exits, I hung back. Stood up. Approached, with trepidation, Sister's big wooden desk.

She was already scowling and correcting her parochial students' papers and so didn't notice me at first as I stood facing her. Now, earlier that same day, in public school, two of my friends, Howard Goldberg and Johnny Jacobsen, had brought into our science class a papier-mâché volcano. And they had poured baking soda into the core of their creation and, with the help of vinegar, had made lava bubble up and spring forth and dribble down the sides. And this demonstration had impressed me and was still very much on my mind.

Sister looked up from the papers she was correcting. "Yes, what is it?"

"Sister, my grandfather moved to this country from Italy in 1890," I said.

Which was true. He had. Pure, untainted non-fiction. But I could see from Sister's clenched facial muscles that it didn't impress her in the least.

And so I continued. "And . . . and, before he came over here, while he was still in Italy, this volcano started erupting in his town early one morning and he was the only one up and so he ran around pounding on people's doors and everyone woke up and ran to safety and . . . and he saved a bunch of people's lives."

Sister's facial muscles relaxed a tad. She cocked her head and her gold rim glasses glinted a little from the light of a fluorescent lamp above our heads. But I could see that my marriage of fact to fiction had fallen just short of being quite enough. For a fiction writer-to-be, it was a moment of truth. A moment suspended in time. Sister waited. I waited. And then, finally, I said, ". . . And the Pope gave him a medal."

Well, Sister smiled broadly. She reached down to her bottom right-hand desk drawer, drew out a holy picture, and gave it to me. The following Wednesday afternoon, Sister knew my name, I had preferred seating up front, and, for the rest of that school year, whenever there was need for a note to pass from Sister to the office, you can probably guess who got to deliver it.

And so, at the tender age of ten, I learned of the rich rewards that can be yours if you take the truth and lie like hell about it.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I did not, after that experience with Sister Mercy, grow up to become a con artist or a pathological liar. I became a high school English teacher. And then a father. And, then at the age of thirty, a fiction writer. We had no money, my bride and I, and when the kids came along, my wife took a leave of absence from the elementary school where she taught and we went abruptly from two teachers' salaries to one.

But I'd begun setting the alarm for 4:30 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday mornings and dragging myself out of bed early and fooling around with fiction. See, I'd get these characters' voices in my head, and I'd write down what they said and worry about them and root for them to be okay and wonder what was going to happen and not know what was going to happen until it came out of the pointy end of my Bic pen. As I worked on these short stories, I defied as best I could another voice, the voice of doubt, that kept saying to me, Stop kidding yourself. You're never getting anything published. Get up from that desk. Go outside and mow the lawn.

But I let the lawn grow and toiled away on weekends and summer vacations and then, one day, ratcheted up my courage and submitted a story to *Northeast* magazine, the Sunday supplement of *The Hartford Courant*. This story, my fourth or fifth, was a first-person tale of a hapless fat woman whose jerk of a husband had just left her. Her name was Mary Ann at first and then she became Dolores. I liked Dolores, who was struggling to survive with self-deprecating humor, biting sarcasm, and Twinkies, Devil Dogs, Mallomars, M&Ms.

I put the story in a manila envelope and mailed it to *Northeast*. For seven months, I heard only the sound of silence. Then one afternoon, long after