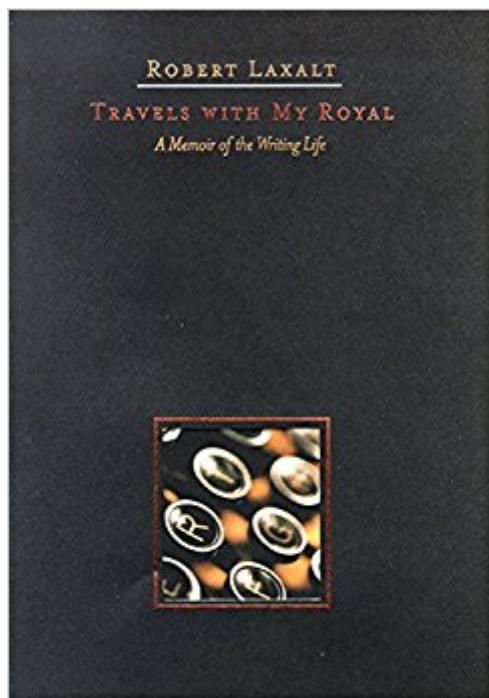


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Travels With My Royal: A Memoir Of The Writing Life (The Basque Series)



Synopsis

Renowned Nevada writer Robert Laxalt has embraced a wide range of subjects in his nearly half-century career. In this candid memoir, he explores what is perhaps his most difficult subject everâ "himself and his life as a writer. The book opens with a series of vignettes about his youth in Carson City as the second son of an immigrant Basque family and his later experiences as a student at the University of Nevada in Reno. The second part of the book tells of Laxalt's career as a writerâ "his early days as a reporter when his assignments included interviews with gangsters and obligatory attendance at executions; his later adventures as a contract writer for National Geographic, and his two stays in the Basque Country. He also recounts his days as director of the University of Nevada's news service and his role in the founding of the University of Nevada Press. The third section discusses the writing of several of his major booksâ "where the ideas came from, what he tried to accomplish in each book, the challenges he faced, and the ways he chose to resolve them. Foreword by Cheryll Glotfelty.

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Customer Reviews

After 17 books and 20 years of National Geographic reportage, Laxalt lets readers peek behind the curtain at the man and his writing process. Divided into three parts "Growing Up," "Writing Days" and "Selected Books and How They Came To Be" Laxalt's anecdotal memoir describes the forces

that shaped him personally and professionally, from his boyhood in Carson City, Nev., through his years as a globe-trotting journalist. In terse yet resonant prose, reminiscent of his previous works, he details how, as a United Press correspondent, he covered executions and interviewed gangsters. As a journalist for National Geographic, he traveled extensively, exploring the life of the gauchos in Argentina and traversing the spine of the Pyrenees. Equally compelling are poignant stories of his beloved Nevada and his Basque-immigrant family: his father was a sheepherder; his mother owned a hotel. In the final section he writes, "the creative process is largely unexplainable," but then deftly examines the nuts and bolts of some of his most important works, including *Sweet Promised Land*, still in print after 40 years. Readers are privy to the intersections between his outward life and his imagination, where plots and characters were born, and to the answers to the questions that each of his stories poses. For readers unfamiliar with Laxalt, this is a great introduction after putting it down, one wants to pick up his previous writings, both fiction and non.

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Laxalt has led a dynamic and multidimensional life, which he now shares in this memoir. He describes his experiences growing up in Nevada during the Depression, which include his family stories of bootlegging and raising sheep. He made it through school and eventually to the University of Nevada, Reno. After graduation, he began a career in journalism, and his life took off. He served as director of news and publications at the University of Nevada and held a simultaneous two-decade assignment as a National Geographic writer; he also cofounded the University of Nevada Press. In his career, he has interviewed mobsters and ridden with gauchos in Argentina, among other things. The second half of the memoir provides background for the books he has written, which include *A Man in the Wheatfield*, *In a Hundred Graves: A Basque Portrait*, and *The Basque Hotel*. This is a fascinating look into the life of one of our great journalists. By the way, the Royal he refers to in his title is the Royal typewriter he carried with him for years. For all collections. Ron Ratliff, Kansas State Univ. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Most of Robert Laxalt's books incorporate some kind of personal reminiscence -- whether it's his arrestingly beautiful portraits of life in the Basque Country or his semi-autobiographical trilogy about a Basque-American family in the West -- but "Travels with My Royal" is his only forthright memoir of his childhood and life as a writer. For fifty years an inseparable mechanical friend traveled alongside him -- his portable Royal typewriter. A gift from his mother, he took it all over the world and wrote all of his books and magazine articles on it. Born in Alturas, California, in 1923, (a place that became a

ghost town not long after), Laxalt was raised in Carson City, Nevada, the second son in a family of immigrant French Basques. His father, Dominique, was a former livestock baron (a "baron of sorts") who saw his flock of over 60,000 sheep and cattle wiped out by a ranch crash and a freeze in the early 1920s. Consequently, he had to go back into the hills and build up his fortune again, slowly, living the hard life of a sheepherder, separated most of the year from his family. Economic woes marked Laxalt's childhood. He mentions how ashamed he was that his mother, who ran an otherwise respectable Basque boardinghouse, sold whiskey on the sly during Prohibition. At school he was often taunted for being the son of a bootlegger. Yet the family eventually got on its feet again, and after spending a year in the Belgian Congo during World War II, Laxalt graduated from the University of Nevada and began to forge a successful career in journalism. His first book, "Sweet Promised Land" (1957), recounts his father Dominique's return to his birthplace in the Basque Country, St. Jean Pied-de-Port up in the French Pyrenees, fifty years after he left it, and the emotional recognition that his real home was not there, but in the hills of western Nevada. In print for over forty years, "Sweet Promised Land" was Laxalt's most resounding success, even though he confesses in "Travels with My Royal" that it was torture to write. Laxalt wrote 16 more books (fiction and non-fiction) before his death earlier this year, and was a regular contributor to National Geographic (he discusses his long love-hate relationship with that magazine in this book). He also taught at the University of Nevada, was the director of its press, and helped found the Basque Studies Program there. Anyone interested in the Basques will soon learn that Laxalt has done more than probably any other writer to help us understand their world. If you're not already familiar with Laxalt's books, read a few first. Here he talks about how works like "Sweet Promised Land" and "In a Hundred Graves" came about, and if you haven't read them, some of it will go over your head.

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