

What Was Mine by Ann Beattie, 1991

- A collage of contemporary lives
- A boy is raised by his unhappy mother and his "uncle" Herb (his widowed mother's lover). Years later, when both are dead, the boy, now a man, receives a legacy from Herb – some sheet music, a drawing of a cocktail cherry on a placemat, love letters to Herb from his mother, and an envelope with two pictures of the boy's father – seemingly meager leavings that summon up the caring of an unsung mentor



WHAT WAS MINE STORIES

"A vibrant new collection by an artist who has continued to grow and mature."
—THE NEW YORK TIMES

“What surprises her most of all is that her characters often end up saying things to each other that have been said to Beattie in real life.

When this happens, it seems the entire story has been written from an unconscious urge to understand the comment and the relationship that spawned it, even though most of the time, it’s a comment Beattie has long forgotten.

But as the story nears the revelatory moment, she recoils. “Some lines you just don’t want to have to write,” she says. “I have to write the sentence before I’m really hit in the face. Then the question is whether I can go on, whether I can switch sides and see the other side of the problem, whether I can imagine it differently from the way I saw it in real life.

For those interested, here is a GREAT writing on the author. It is part biography, part writing process, part psychology, and all engaging. [oates.qxd \(lacycrawford.com\)](mailto:oates.qxd@lacycrawford.com)

- Born September 1947. Her childhood in Washington, D.C., was marked by solitude and holds little interest for her.
- Her father, who worked for the government, “didn’t laugh much” but had “a very weird sense of humor, a perverse glee in causing a bit of trouble and then going on as if it hadn’t happened.”
- Her mother quit work after Beattie was born, but unhappily; Beattie suspects her father, “a very old-fashioned thinker,” would have “encouraged, if not insisted” that his wife stay at home with their daughter, though he himself would sometimes leave for days at a time, unannounced. (Before her father died, in 2002, he had read an occasional piece of Beattie’s in The New Yorker, but, she says, “he had little idea what to make of it.”)
- The small family kept to itself: “My parents never once,” she recalls, “ever, had friends over for dinner.”
- The extended family – aunts, uncles, cousins – “might have been a million miles away. I didn’t know them then, and I still don’t know them, and there’re not many of them.” She was bored at home and bored at school.
- I read books, and loved books, but that’s not to be confused with displaying talent. I was an utterly average child.”
- 1969, graduated American University, English major. “Vague ambitions”
- University of Connecticut, English, goal of teaching. B- grades. 1973-1976
- Started to write short stories as a hobby. Writing was a fun, it was procrastination from her homework.
- No writers’ workshops...her style is her own.
- A professor offered to review, and – with no contacts – forwarded her work to publications. The New Yorker expressed interest.
- She sent 22 stories to the magazine. 21 were rejected.



Later became a professor