

## Questions for Sue Monk Kidd

**Q: In *Traveling with Pomegranates*, you record all your dreams in a journal. Why?**

A: I've always been a journal-keeper. I've always tried to write about how I'm experiencing life, and my feelings and thoughts. Then gradually it occurred to me that we spend a great deal of life asleep and that dreams are little narratives, little stories. I thought, who's choreographing this stuff? Then I began to read C.G. Jung, and I became convinced that there was meaning in all of this, even though it could be difficult to decipher. Dreams serve some impulse toward wholeness in the psyche.

**Q: More than once in the new book, you mention that early response to the short story that grew into *The Secret Life of Bees* was tepid. One critique said the potential for a novel was small. What made you persist with your first novel?**

A: Those moments serve you pretty well because you come to terms with certain things about who's to be believed and your own creative vision. You have to ask yourself, will I pursue this? Am I going to take my cues internally or externally?

**Q: The title for the book is taken from the myth of another mother/daughter duo, — Demeter, goddess of the harvest, and Persephone. In one version, Persephone is abducted into the underworld and Hecate, an old crone and goddess of the crossroads, breaks the news to Demeter, who's so upset that the crops die. Thanks to Zeus, Persephone returns to Earth, but because she has swallowed pomegranate seeds in the underworld, she must return there for four months every year. In your book, you note that the three women in the myth can be read as three parts or phases of the same woman. How are you feeling about your place on this continuum?**

A: The last 10 years have been a deepening of what I experienced on the trip. It does seem to me that we come to a moment when there is a crossing-over, when we are looking for a portal into that older womanhood. Usually we write about the physical aspects of menopause. About beauty and health and appearance. Which is important. But I felt like there was some transition the soul needed to make, and I wanted to understand how to navigate that. ... The mother-daughter experience is so profound and intense. Mothers often see daughters, unconsciously, as appendages of themselves. But daughters leave. So you might experience your own young womanhood leaving through your daughter.

## Questions for Ann Kidd Taylor

**Q: During the writing of *Traveling with Pomegranates*, did you and your mother edit each other's chapters?**

A: That was the challenge of the book. How to make the alternating chapters rather seamless. This worked well because we live a whole 15 minutes away from each other in South Carolina. We could get together when we needed to, swap chapters and talk about

them. There was a great deal of discussion and brainstorming. And of course, the chapters had to be rewritten and rewritten.

**Q: Your mother has been on book tours before, but this is your first. How do you feel?**

A: There's a part of me that just cannot even believe that this book is a book. That it's in bookstores and that we wrote all of it.

**Q: You write movingly about your own depression in the book. Early on, you were getting over a breakup with a college boyfriend. Later, you were unmoored by a rejection from a graduate program in ancient history. Were you anxious about putting such personal experiences in a book that millions of people might read?**

A: I never felt when I was writing that I was writing something I shouldn't be telling. I just wanted my story to be authentic. This will sound odd, but part of me was more comfortable *writing* about it.

**Q: In *Traveling with Pomegranates*, Athena emerges as an important figure for you. What does she represent?**

A: She represents that sense of belonging to yourself, that part of yourself that's untouchable. She was so many things. Goddess of wisdom and creativity. A warrior. She became a way for me to hold on to myself.

## Mother-daughter journey *Finding themselves—and each other—on a trip abroad* Interview by Rebecca Bain

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During the summer of 1998, Sue Monk Kidd, whose best-selling books include *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Mermaid Chair*, found herself in a free fall toward her 50th birthday. As a consolation gift for herself and a college graduation present for her daughter, Ann Kidd Taylor, she whisked the two of them off to Greece. Thus begins *Traveling With Pomegranates*, a memoir of their journey together, literal and spiritual, written by both women. It was a journey that allowed them to discover and appreciate each other as adults, as well as mother and daughter.



Kidd and Taylor reconvened recently at Kidd's home in Charleston, South Carolina, the city where both women live, to reflect on their unique joint project. According to Kidd, the most difficult aspect of the book was figuring out how to structure it.

"There was my story, there was Ann's story, and then we had this third story which was about the two of us and our relationship. So really, there were three intersecting layers to this book," Kidd recalls in an interview with BookPage. "It just got more and more complicated. The main thing was, we knew this had to be the narrative of our relationship. But trying to figure out how to make all these different layered stories work together and feel seamless and flow into one another was the biggest challenge."

The title, *Traveling With Pomegranates*, resonates on several levels, beginning with the significance of the pomegranate. In Greek mythology, Hades, lord of the dead, kidnaps the young maiden, Persephone, and takes her with him to the underworld.

Persephone's mother, the Earth goddess Demeter, goes into deep mourning, allowing crops to wither and turning fields and orchards into a wasteland. To save the Earth and its people, Zeus orders Persephone released, but she has eaten four pomegranate seeds while in captivity. Thus, she must return to the underworld four months of the year, while her mother again mourns her absence and the land sleeps in winter. Kidd and Taylor were going through some difficult life experiences of their own at the time of their trip to Greece. Kidd was coming to terms with aging, looking for the courage to try writing a novel (her first, which became *The Secret Life of Bees*), hoping to reconnect in a meaningful way with her daughter, and realizing that as a person with great drive and ambition, her life lacked the joy of just "being."

"This reconciliation of the opposites, the reconciliation of these poles of polarity we've lived and experienced in life, it seems like they come home to roost as we get older," Kidd says. "It became something about learning how to both 'be' and to accomplish and write and create and make a difference. That was a very hard reconciliation for me. It went right to my core."

Taylor had just broken up with her fiancé and was struggling with the "what do I do with my life" issues young people often face. The shattered romance and lack of direction had put Taylor into a fairly severe depression. As she writes in the book, "Being in Greece did not resolve the big questions for me, but I did discover some things. I learned how easy it is to give up and become draperies while everyone else is dancing. I learned there is a name for how I feel—depression—and I had to face up to that. I learned that Persephone does eventually come back from the underworld and that maybe I would, too. That I could talk to my mother. That while I have no idea what to do with my life, I am not a total loser."

Speaking from her mother's home, Taylor says she sees special significance in the story of the pomegranate. "The pomegranate and the swallowing of the seeds, it's such a perfect example of how a symbol can take on individual connotations. For my mom it was about Demeter's loss. For me, it was about Persephone's transformation and the return that she made back to the world from this naive, untested girl to someone transformed."

In fact, symbols and talismans form a huge subtext in the memoir. Kidd wears a small silver bee charm around her neck, hoping it will inspire her to write her novel. She buys two glass pomegranates for

herself and her daughter while in Greece, to remind them of Demeter and Persephone. She carries a small statue of Mary, Jesus' mother, on the trip. Kidd believes symbols and talismans can tell individuals a great deal about themselves. "Symbols take us to a world that is deeper than our conscious minds are usually operating with. They open the door to a world that's often under the surface and that has larger meanings than the ones we are consciously, on the surface, dealing with on a day-to-day basis. So a pomegranate is not just a piece of nutritious fruit." Laughing, she continues, "I was compelled by the pomegranate because of the myth, and when I explored that myth, I was amazed to discover a whole story about a mother's necessary loss and finding reunion. That took me in a very moving and meaningful direction in my life. So I came through being open to symbols. They give me courage."

It was almost 10 years after that first trip to Greece together (the book also chronicles a return trip to Greece and one to France) that Kidd and Taylor finished their memoir. The two women had kept detailed journals, which proved invaluable when writing their story. But Kidd believes memory is like a muscle—the more you flex it, the stronger it becomes.

"Memory can be very elusive, but I do think it's almost like a living, breathing thing inside of us. It's all there, somewhere inside. If we can learn how to tap it, it does come flooding back." An afterword to **Traveling With Pomegranates** closes with one of Kidd's favorite quotes:

"'We write to taste life twice,' Anais Nin wrote, 'in the moment and in retrospection.' Living the experiences in this book and then writing them was a privilege and a gift, but what I savored most was doing so with Ann. Tasting life together. Twice (Retasting)"



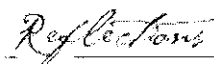
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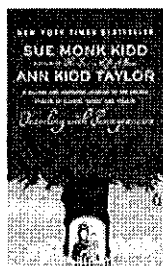
REFLECTIONS

- Thoughts on Writing
- The Secret Life of Bees
- The Mermaid Chair
- Other Musings
- Traveling with Pomegranates



Reading Pomegranates Through Your Own Lens

"As the writers sightsee, they connect to and challenge each other in ways that will make you want to hit the road with the important women in your life, even if the corner of Starbucks is the only realistic destination for you now."  
- Redbook Magazine



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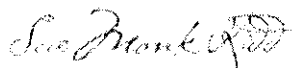
Traveling with Pomegranates is out in paperback today!

Co-authored with my daughter, Ann, our joint memoir arrives with a brand new cover - a whimsical depiction of a myrtle tree that grows in a remote convent on the island of Crete. I'm sure the tree found its way onto the cover because Ann and I each had what you might call a spiritual turning point beneath the tree's mystical old branches and chronicled those experiences in the book. Let's just say, the tree lived up to its reputation for eliciting surprise and small miracles.

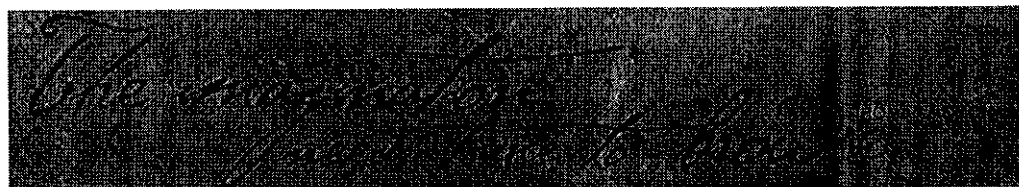
Traveling with Pomegranates has often been described by readers as a memoir about change. Certainly, in its pages, Ann and I are each in the throes of tumultuous transitions: Ann is a young woman leaving college with no idea of what to do with her life, while I am turning 50, headed toward older womanhood with no idea of what to do with my life either. Other readers, however, have experienced the book primarily as a travel memoir, coming along with Ann and me as we explore places both familiar and out-of-the-way in Greece, France and Turkey. Still others read Traveling with Pomegranates largely as a mother-daughter memoir that unfolds the personal story of a crossroads in Ann's and my relationship. Quite a few people also told us they felt the book was really about finding one's creative or spiritual path.

It seems we read memoir through the lens of our own need and experience, which is exactly as it should be. So, however you might read Traveling with Pomegranates, may it bring you more fully into your own life and evoke your own encounters with surprise and small miracles.

Happy Reading!



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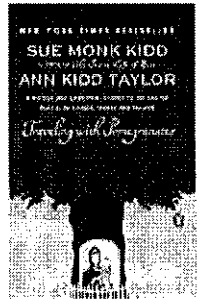
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**Traveling With Pomegranates**  
**A Mother and Daughter Journey to the Sacred Places of Greece, Turkey, and France**  
 by Sue Monk Kidd and Ann Kidd Taylor



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**About This Book**

*The New York Times* bestselling memoir of pilgrimage and metamorphosis by the author of **The Secret Life of Bees** and her daughter.

Sue Monk Kidd has touched the hearts of millions of readers with her beloved novels and acclaimed nonfiction. Now, in this wise and engrossing dual memoir, she and her daughter, Ann, chronicle their travels together through Greece and France at a time when each was on a quest to redefine herself and rediscover each other.

As Sue struggles to enlarge a vision of swarming bees into a novel, and Ann ponders the classic question of what to do with her life, this modern-day Demeter and Persephone explore an array of inspiring figures and sacred sites. They also give voice to that most protean of human connections: the bond of mothers and daughters.

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