Readers Respond to O My God:

"Beautiful! Powerful! There are sooo many gems that touched my mind and heart—phenomenal insights ... incredibly valuable." ~ \mathcal{JC} , trauma survivor and free spirit

"What a comforting book. What an incredible read. Beautifully described insights and intimate details of Celia, of others, of her relationship with God. I didn't actually want the conversation to end but I ended up finding a prayer in almost every line. So it really doesn't end." $\sim DA$, trauma survivor and sober alcoholic

"Brilliant ... Impeccable ... Fascinating ... Intoxicating ... Mind-bogglingly succinct ... Naturally elegant ... The truth-telling and humour is pure elixir. A book about spiritual and emotional healing; a beautiful and inviting treasure, a precious reveal of heart-centred truths and a quest for the good. Celia describes serious losses with care and unflinching clarity. There is great wisdom here for those who value truth and integrity and shudder at lies. Celia is startlingly sincere and devoted, and wild and untameable. Her reader will gladly trundle down any alley with her, or into any number of bars, knowing they are in her capable hands. O My God will be of great interest even to people who do not adhere to any religion or even spiritual tradition, to anyone wanting to feel less alone. Celia does a piece of our journey for us." ~ AS, trauma survivor and life poet

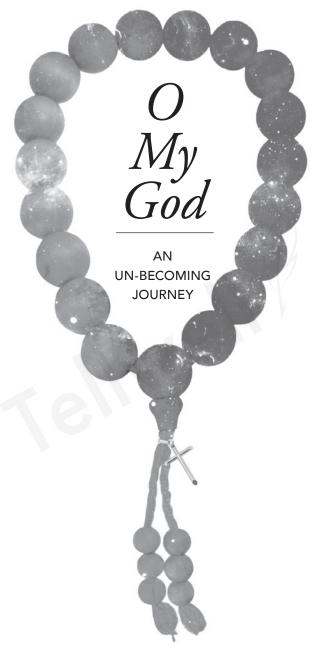
"I am in awe of Celia's courage in not only daring to be true to herself, but also in being willing to expose that self to others." ~ *Hennie, found in these pages*

By Celia McBride

THEATRE
So Many Doors

FILM
Last Stop for Miles

CELIA MCBRIDE



INTOXICATING ... DARING ... UNFLINCHING ...

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"For me to be a saint means to be myself."

~ Thomas Merton

"God is the condition of possibility of any entity whatsoever, including ourselves. God is the answer to why there is something rather than nothing."

~ Terry Eagleton

JOURNEY POINTS

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TO BE CLEAR ...

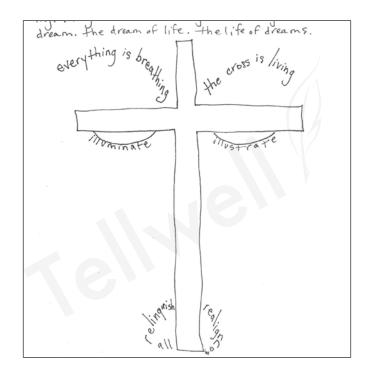
or a while, the working subtitle of this book was A Journey of Un-Belief. "Unbelief" was a play on the word "unbelievable" (because ending up in a convent, for me, was), and the term "unbeliever," which Christians often use to describe non-Christians. You see, technically I am an unbeliever. I don't actually believe in God, although at one time I would have said that I did. Belief is fickle, however, and it erodes over time. Today, I would say God is not someone I believe in. God is something I experience.

Throughout the book, when I refer to God, I am not talking about the Sky God, represented by antiquated depictions of a white man with a white beard directing human activity from the white clouds. That God, burdened by religious history and fanaticism, catastrophically divides the very children "He" is supposed to be looking after. Don't get me wrong, this Heavenly Man-God works well for a lot of people, but

God, if nothing else, is a shape-shifter. For me, God can be anything because God is Every Thing.

Science provides proof that everything seen and unseen is made of the same stuff, called Energy. By exchanging the word Energy for the word God, I am able to see that there is no thing that God is not, and that whatever God is, It is in no way separate from Who and What We Are.

I use many names to describe That Which Cannot Be Named or Described (and I capitalize those names, much to the chagrin of my editors), but the G-word prevails in these pages because, despite its divisiveness, it's a perfectly good word: simple, short, apt. It does the job. But, for God's sake, when I tell you I am praying to the Lord, please remember: It's Way Beyond That.



PART ONE GROWING UP

ARRIVAL



hen I was born I got my face bashed in.
"You came out face-first," my mother tells me.

Face-first? Who comes out face-first? A very small percentage of newborns, apparently. We are malpresentations of the facial variety and this kind of delivery is generally classified as birth trauma. Right from the get-go, I was f*cked.

A water-stained Kodak-colour photograph taken on the day I arrived home shows a tiny face covered in raw, red bruises. The sunny-yellow bunting bag wrapped around my little body cannot disguise the fact that I look like a boxer after a fight.

It was September 1971, in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. Canada's Far North. "A gorgeous time of year," my mother wrote on a birthday card, decades later. "There was a glazing of ice on the puddles and the trees were electric yellow."

Was I fighting to get out because I couldn't wait to be born? Maybe. The persistence I showed in my birth-story certainly set up a life-long pattern of pushing myself too hard.

Gotta get there first. Gotta win!

Of needing to see and be seen.

Craning my neck forward to check things out ... look at me doing it!

Of desiring the full, divine and human experience.

O, to be in the world Spirit now flesh, Alive in earthly form!

I am a perfectionist-addict, curious seeker and vainglorious show-off, lover of God. Only the last attribute saves me from the turmoil caused by the rest.

When I say I'm in love with God what I really mean is that I am in love with Existence. Not just existing, for that can sometimes be what I do not love, but *the Actuality of my Existence*. That is what I am truly in love with. God is the Great Mystery of our collective being and I love this Mystery with all of my heart. The best part about it? This Love can be experienced as reciprocal.

My first experience of Divine Union happened early, at the age of three or four years old, when I discovered that pressing my fists into the hollows of my closed eyes produced exploding fireworks of every colour, dancing and pulsing, changing and shifting, taking me into outer space. But this was inner space! At that age, I would not have been able to say "this is God" but I somehow knew these mysterious images of colourful rolling clouds and fiery bursts of stars existing inside of my body were God, and I would do this ritual until my eyeballs hurt.

How did I know about God? It was mostly innate. Neither of my parents came from a religious family. I am a common Canadian mix of Irish, Scottish, English and French (which basically means white and Christian), yet both my maternal and paternal grandparents had essentially become atheists, or perhaps humanists, rejecting the Church after being raised in their respective Christian homes. My mother's parents, known to me and my three sisters as Granny Jayne and Jack (he never liked "Grandpa"), both grew up in the Protestant tradition. Granny Jayne thought a dash of Christian education was a good idea and so my mother and her three sisters occasionally attended both United Church of Canada and Unitarian services.

My paternal grandfather, Russell McBride, had been raised Catholic, but it didn't stick. My father recalls his dad telling the story of how he and his boyhood friends would all run and hide when they saw the priest coming down the road. As a hard-working adult, Russell preferred to sleep in on Sundays. My grandmother, Phyllis, was Protestant and took her children (my dad and aunt Cheryl) to the United Church because churchgoing was just what people did in the 1950s. My dad was baptized and attended Sunday School, but there was no real commitment to the faith, and their church attendance dwindled as he got older.

By the time my parents had me and my three sisters (Jessica, Clara and Melissa), any thought of going to church had gone out the window and none of us were baptized or christened or whatever it was called.

Primary school introduced me to the Sky God or the God of *The Lord's Prayer*, *O Canada* and *God Save* the Queen. My mother, Eve, a writer and an artist, would often say she believed in a "Greater Power of the Universe," but she would rail against any dogmatic version of God. While insisting to this day that she is a Christian ("Of course I believe in the teachings of Jesus, who wouldn't?"), she loves to denounce religion for "impinging on natural and benevolent human instincts and dictating individual freedom of choice."

My father, Terry, says things like, "If God created the world, then who the hell created God?" He is a nature-loving lawyer who insists that his desire to die on a Yukon mountaintop has nothing to do with spirituality. "They bury you in the ground and the worms eat you." (I loved this line enough to put it in one of my films, years later.) As for Christianity, he is totally baffled by the fact that Christians believe that it is possible to have a personal relationship with Jesus and, while he might finally admit to being agnostic, his contempt for organized religion is no secret.

Because there was no God to reject and no religious structure to rebel against, I had no church to quit. Left to my own devices and at complete liberty to discover for myself the Great Mystery Behind Existence, I became a seeker. Instead of denouncing God, I went looking.

Where does one with a religious disposition turn when she does not have religion at home? In my case, to someone else's church. When I was five, I asked my parents if I could go to Sunday School with a playmate. It is a testament to their open-mindedness that they let me go. Though the experience is non-existent in my own memory, the story is now famous in the family circle: "You came home and tried to convert the whole family," my parents say.

"What kind of church was it?" I ask my mother. "Baptist, I think."

Celia McBride

What happened to me at that church service? Where was this newfound holy desire coming from? Was I simply enthralled, as so many children are, by a nice-looking man named Jesus who *loved me* "for the Bible told me so"? Was I moved by the welcome from a church family, kindly people who embraced me and celebrated together with songs and stories? Or was my little heart, already on fire with adoration for the Cosmos-behind-my-eyes, newly touched by the charismatic energy of God, manifest in a long-ago story about Christ the Saviour?

Whatever it was, my fervour didn't last long. I did not continue attending church with my friend, and no one remembers why. But the seed of Christian curiosity, which took hold of me in later years, was probably planted in that primitive evangelical soil.