

# Author: 12,000 witnesses back the story

Pulitzer-prize winner  
McCourt weighs in on  
memoir fact-fudging

By BOB HOOVER  
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

The success of Frank McCourt's "Angela's Ashes," his 1996 smash memoir and Pulitzer Prize winner, gave the genre such a big shot in the arm that we're still feeling the aftershocks.

The number of autobiographies that have tapped into what McCourt calls the misery of people's lives has increased steadily ever since, as writers strained to outdo each other in their accounts of personal agony, disgrace and despair.

McCourt himself has added to the output with two sequels, "Tis" in 1999 and "Teacher Man" last year.

Both books, however, were hopeful and full of McCourt's dry humor.

When things went awry in the memoir field, as they did rather noisily with James Frey and his flawed "A Million Little Pieces" in January, McCourt was called in to comment, reluctantly.

"I've backed off talking about it," he said from his Connecticut home. "Katie Couric on NBC wanted to talk about it ... and Larry King. I'm not going to be sucked into that.

"Besides, as far as 'Teacher Man' is concerned, I've got about 12,000 witnesses to the things that happened in my classroom."

That account of McCourt's 30 years in the New York City public school system is keeping the 75-year-old writer on an international promotion tour.

The Irish-born author points out that he also has witnesses for his other books as well.

"I've got brothers. ... If I've misrepresented anything, they're there and they'd give me 'The Look.'"

McCourt believes that when writing about your life, there's no such thing as a black-and-white account.

"I'm always quoting Gore Vidal, who said, 'A memoir is an impression of your life.' First of all, there are the facts, and as a writer, you pick and choose and that's what you give to the public.

But he added, "What you give has to be true. You don't claim you were 86 days in jail when you were three hours in jail," he said, referring to one of Frey's exaggerations.

It's teaching rather than writing that concerns McCourt readers these days, he said.

"Everywhere I go I hear from teachers. They're very happy that there's a voice out there speaking for them," said McCourt, who

taught English in several high schools.

"The teachers are glad to hear somebody who was on the inside, inside the classroom, rather than outsiders who are full of negative comments and plain hostility," he said.

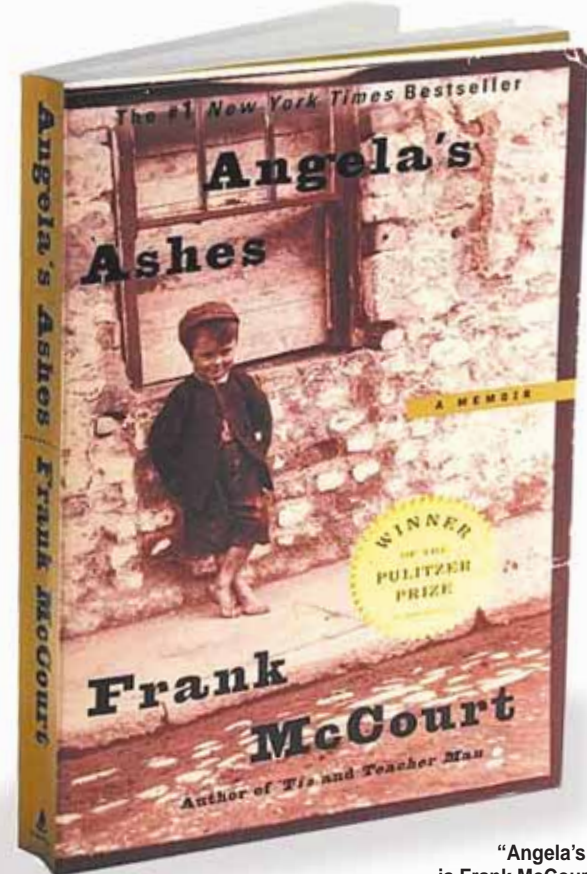
McCourt cited the long hours, working nights and weekends grading papers and the generally poor salaries of most public school teachers as issues parents — and politicians — fail to recognize.

Would he teach again?

"If I had to do it again, I'd be a college professor," he said. "They teach a few hours a week, not every day, and they're called 'professor' and get respect."

As for his next writing project, he would like to try fiction.

"I'd like to try my hand at a lot of things. Time is getting short," he said. "It depends. If I behave myself and don't overindulge."



"Angela's Ashes" is Frank McCourt's 1996 memoir and Pulitzer Prize winner.

## PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY BEST SELLERS

### HARDCOVER FICTION

1. "5th Horseman" by James Patterson and Maxine Paetro (Little, Brown)
2. "The Da Vinci Code" by Dan Brown (Doubleday)
3. "The House" by Danielle Steel (Delacorte Press)
4. "The Last Templar" by Raymond Khoury (Dutton Adult)
5. "Cell: A Novel" by Stephen King (Scribner)
6. "The Templar Legacy" by Steve Berry (Ballantine Books)
7. "In the Company of the Courtesan" by Sarah Dunant (Random House)
8. "The Rebels of Ireland" by Edward Rutherfurd (Doubleday)
9. "The Two Minute Rule" by Robert Crais (Simon & Schuster)
10. "Sea Change" by Robert B. Parker (Putnam Adult)

### NONFICTION/GENERAL

1. "Marley and Me" by John Grogan (Morrow)
2. "The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century" by Thomas L. Friedman (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
3. "Inspiration: Your Ultimate Calling" by Wayne W. Dyer (Hay House)
4. "Freakonomics" by Steven D. Levitt, Stephen J. Dubner (William Morrow)
5. "Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer" by James L. Swanson (William Morrow)
6. "The Purpose-Driven Life" by Rick Warren (Zondervan)
7. "Jim Cramer's Real Money" by James J. Cramer (Simon & Schuster)
8. "If You Could See What I See" by Sylvia Brown (Hay House)
9. "You're Wearing That?: Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation" by Deborah Tannen (Random House)
10. "The Sonoma Diet" by Connie Guttersen and Stephanie Karpinske (Meredith Books)

# Do-it-yourself lawn care

By DICK HUBER  
MASTER GARDENER

Your lawn will soon be calling you outdoors. Follow these tips to help your grass green up and stay that way throughout the summer.

## Mowing

Mowing at a height of about 3 inches helps crowd out weeds, keeps the soil cooler and preserves soil moisture. Make sure the blade is sharp and leave the clippings unless they are excessive.

## Seeding

Seeding can be done in the spring but may require watering through the summer and the seedlings are competing with weeds in the spring.

As a general rule, you'll need to seed any bare area larger than a softball.

Late August and early September are the desired times to sow grass seed. If the lawn has some weeds and weedy grasses, overseeding may help.

If the lawn has very little desired grass, complete renovation may be needed.

Good choices for seed are a blend of all Kentucky bluegrass, all turf-type tall fescue or an 80 to 90 percent blend of Kentucky bluegrass and 10 to 20 percent of perennial ryegrass.

The seed must be in contact with the soil and watered frequently in order to germinate in three weeks. If straw is used as a cover, half of the soil surface should be visible.

## Weeds

Some annual weeds, such as chickweed and henbit, should be treated this spring. Otherwise they will produce seed, and though the plant will die this year, the seed will sprout new weeds next spring.

Fall is an ideal time to kill perennial weeds such as dandelion, when roots are more active. But spring weed killing is OK.

Ingredients in a good weed killer should be at least two of the following: 2, 4-D, MCPP or dicamba.

A small hand sprayer is ideal for a few scattered weeds. An overall sprayer or spreader may be necessary for heavier concentration of weeds or large areas.

## Spring Lawn Care Class

**When:** 9 to 11:30 a.m. March 25

**Where:** Franklin Library, 401 S. State St.

**Cost:** None

**Registration:** Required to assure adequate handouts. To register, call 738-2833.

**Instructor:** Dick Huber, Greenwood resident and master gardener

**What to expect:** The class is geared toward people who desire a good-looking lawn with a minimal amount of money and effort.

Special emphasis will be given to the proper time to apply fertilizer and crabgrass killer. Fertilizing too early in the spring will result in frequent mowing. Crabgrass seed germinates around late April to early May, so proper timing is important.

If two applications are applied yearly, then September and November are ideal. Late May, September and November are the times for making three applications of fertilizer per year.

Fall is the time of the year that grass plants are storing nutrients in the roots for the following year.

Fertilizing in the spring and summer provides more instant top growth without supplying the roots with nutrients. But spring fertilization produces a lot of green grass and makes the lawn-care companies look good, especially on the way to their banks.

Follow the directions on the fertilizer bag.

## Crabgrass

A good control of crabgrass is a pre-emergent applied in the spring before the crabgrass seed germinates, which is usually around late April to early May.

A pre-emergent should be applied around mid-April to prevent the crabgrass seeds from germinating if you had a crabgrass problem last year. If our spring is warmer than usual, you should consider applying the pre-emergent soon.

## Soil

If the soil is hard, mostly clay or there is a problem with thatch, then a core aerator used in the spring or fall will provide good benefits.

## Grubs

If Japanese beetles have been a problem or areas of dead grass can be lifted up, then grubs may be a problem.

If one square foot of grass is removed and six or more grubs are seen, then an insecticide applied from mid-July to mid-August will help control grubs.

## Summary

Mow at 3 inches, use a sharp blade, leave the clippings, consider aerating in the spring or fall, fertilize once or twice in the fall and maybe late May but not before.

Spray weeds in the spring and/or fall.

Avoid overusing chemicals such as insecticides and weed killers. They can be harmful to children and pets.

Dick Huber is a master gardener who lives in Greenwood.

## MORE TIPS FROM PROS

### Make home-made bug killer

Mix together and apply with a spray bottle or hose sprayer:

- ½ lemon Joy
- ½ lemon ammonia
- ½ water

**Tip:** This mixture is great for spraying on yards to deter mosquitoes. They hate lemon.

### Perfect plants for a butterfly garden

- Daylilies
- Butterfly bushes
- Knock-out roses
- Orange butterfly weed

### Make your own yard art

- Yard tools can become a funky trellis.
- Use kitchen utensils, beads and imagination to make wind chimes.
- Find an antique pillar or column at an auction and place a bird bath or bird house on top.
- Paint sayings on pieces of barn wood found at auctions and attach them to sticks.

SOURCES: Gardeners Sharon Parish and Angela Arnold of Franklin and Julie Stewart of Bargersville



Items like this stone decorate Sharon Parish's backyard garden.

## • Art

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

removed the bench where Josh had been sitting. As she prepared to stage a new idea, Sam disappeared behind the backdrop.

"Sam," Mundy said. "Oh, Sam I am. Come out here."

After Mundy coaxed Sam out from behind the backdrop, she decided to take a few individual photographs of the children.

"We've got this really pretty twirly dress," Mundy said to Alli. "Would you like to try it on?"

Alli happily changed from the pink dress she wore in to the studio to a floor-length pink dress with white tulle. As Mundy tells Alli to twirl like a ballerina, she snapped more photographs.

Next, Mundy rolled up Sam's pant legs and asked him to stand barefoot next to a sailboat prop.

"Do you have a pocket, Sam?" Mundy said. "Stick your thumb in that pocket."

For poses of the older Petty children, Mundy moved two different types of columns to the middle of the backdrop.

"You're almost grown up now, Ben," she said. "Lean against this post for me, like you're standing on a corner, waiting for cute girls to walk by."

While Mundy arranged Josh and Ben on the floor for another group photo, Sam crawled behind his older brothers.

Alli walked away, calmly removed her white patent leather shoes and white anklets and said, "I'm not going to be in this picture."

It was controlled chaos, a typical hour in Mundy's workday as a child photographer.

Mundy's love of photographing children began nearly 20 years ago, after the birth of her first child, Aurora.

"When you have that first child, there's just something about that little face," Mundy said.

Mundy, 43, constantly carried a camera. She shot photos of her daughter, asleep in the car seat, cooing at her, even fussing.

She teaches parents that successful photography sessions are not necessarily defined by a string of cheesy smiles.

"The truth is that kids don't always smile all the time," Mundy said. "You might as well catch the many moods they have."

This is true, Melisa Petty said. Three years ago, she scheduled photos of her children before Sam was born.

On that particular day, Alli was a cranky toddler.

Mundy placed a pair of angel wings on the fussy child and set her in front of the camera.

"She had one tear on her cheek," Petty said of the photos. "And those are beautiful pictures."

Mundy lives in Indianapolis with her husband, Larry, and children Aurora, 19, Caleb, 12, and Clint, 6.

She said she and other photographers in the studio have a common goal.

"We create art," Mundy said, "not just pictures for people. It's artwork; it just happens to be your child."

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