



RUN TOWARDS THE DANGER

CONFRONTATIONS WITH A BODY OF MEMORY

SARAH
POLLEY

With illustrations by Lauren Tamaki



sample chapter

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

First published in the UK in 2022 by September Publishing

First published in 2022 by Hamish Hamilton, an imprint of Penguin Canada,
a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited

Copyright © Sarah Polley 2022

The right of Sarah Polley to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted
by her in accordance with the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

“Let It Go” from Frozen. Music and Lyrics by Kristen Anderson-Lopez and
Robert Lopez © 2013 Wonderland Music Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Used by Permission. Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard LLC.

“There’s No Business Like Show Business” by Irving Berlin © 1946 Irving Berlin Music Co.,
admin by Williamson Music Co. (ASCAP), A division of The Rodgers & Hammerstein
Organization: A Concord Company. All Rights Reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright holder

Book and cover design by Kelly Hill
Interior illustrations by Lauren Tamaki

Printed in Poland on paper from responsibly managed, sustainable sources by Hussar Books

ISBN 9781914613210
EPUB ISBN 9781914613227

September Publishing
www.septemberpublishing.org

Preface

“Living backwards!” Alice repeated in great astonishment. “I never heard of such a thing!”

“—but there’s one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways.”

“I’m sure mine only works one way,” Alice remarked. “I can’t remember things before they happen.”

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,” the Queen remarked.

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

The working title of this book was “Living Backwards,” inspired by the Queen’s suggestion to Alice that memory can work more than one way. “Living Backwards,” though, sounds like a memoir that covers the scope of a lifetime. If this were a memoir or an autobiography, it would be woefully incomplete. I am both far luckier than these essays would imply if they were read as a map of my life, and I have experienced more trauma than I have given chapters to.

I originally wrote these essays as stand-alone pieces. I wrote some of them over many years, in some cases decades, abandoning them for long stretches, unsure if I had the courage to finish them or if they had

a place in the world. As the essays began to shape themselves into a book, I realized that the connective tissue between them was a dialogue that was occurring between two very different time frames in my life. The past was affecting how I moved through the world, while present life was affecting how the past moved through me.

I've been acutely aware that my childhood experiences inform my current life. I have, until recently, been less conscious of the power of my adult life to inform my relationship to my memories. When I was lucky enough to have experiences in adulthood that echoed pivotal, difficult memories, and to have those experiences go another, better way than they had in the past, my relationship to those memories shifted. The meaning of long-ago experiences transformed in the context of the ever-changing present.

The past and present, I have come to realize, are in constant dialogue, acting upon one another in a kind of reciprocal pressure dance.

When I first met concussion specialist Dr. Michael Collins, after three and a half years of suffering from post-concussive syndrome, he said, "If you remember only one thing from this meeting, remember this: run towards the danger." In order for my brain to recover from a traumatic injury, I had to retrain it to strength by charging towards the very activities that triggered my symptoms. This was a paradigm shift for me—to greet and welcome the things I had previously avoided.

As I recovered from my concussion, "run towards the danger" became a kind of incantation for me in relation to the rest of my life. I began to hear it as a challenge to take on the project of addressing and questioning my own narratives.

What follows are some of the most dangerous stories of my life: the ones I have avoided, the ones I haven't told, the ones that have kept me awake on countless nights. These are stories that have haunted and directed me, unwittingly, down circuitous paths. As these stories found echoes in my adult life, and then went another, better way than they did in childhood, they became lighter and easier to carry.

These stories don't add up to a portrait of a life, or even a snapshot of one. They are about the transformative power of an ever-evolving relationship to memory. Telling them is a form of running towards the danger.