

# Joan Didion

## Quotes

*Writing, Thinking, People, Self, Book, Mean, Want, Memories, Order, Children,  
Eye, Night, Dream, Men, Different, Trying, New York, California, Believe,  
Character*

The wind shows us how close to the edge we are.

~Joan Didion

The willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life is the source from which self-respect springs.

~Joan Didion

To cure jealousy is to see it for what it is, a dissatisfaction with self.

~Joan Didion

We are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find them attractive company or not.

~Joan Didion

I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.

~Joan Didion

Memory fades, memory adjusts, memory conforms to what we think we remember.

~Joan Didion

We forget all too soon the things we thought we could never forget.

~Joan Didion

The fear is for what is still to be lost.

~Joan Didion

Do not whine... Do not complain. Work harder. Spend more time alone.

~Joan Didion

Short stories demand a certain awareness of one's own intentions, a certain narrowing of the focus.

~Joan Didion

Of course great hotels have always been social ideas, flawless mirrors to the particular societies they service.

~Joan Didion

That no one dies of migraine seems, to someone deep into an attack, an ambiguous blessing.

~Joan Didion

We tell ourselves stories in order to live.

~Joan Didion

It occurs to me that we allow ourselves to imagine only such messages as we need to survive.

~Joan Didion

Ask anyone committed to Marxist analysis how many angels on the head of a pin, and you will be asked in return to never mind the angels, tell me who controls the production of pins.

~Joan Didion

Life changes in the instant. The ordinary instant.

~Joan Didion

Grammar is a piano I play by ear. All I know about grammar is its power.

~Joan Didion

Grammar is a piano I play by ear.

~Joan Didion

Self-respect is a question of recognizing that anything worth having has a price.

~Joan Didion

Had I been blessed with even limited access to my own mind there would have been no reason to write.

~Joan Didion

My writing is a process of rewriting, of going back and changing and filling in. In the rewriting process you discover what's going on, and you go back and bring it up to that point.

~Joan Didion

Writing nonfiction is more like sculpture, a matter of shaping the research into the finished thing.

~Joan Didion

We all survive more than we think we can.

~Joan Didion

A single person is missing for you, and the whole world is empty.

~Joan Didion

Writers are always selling somebody out.

~Joan Didion

To free us from the expectations of others, to give us back to ourselves - there lies the great, singular power of self-respect.

~Joan Didion

[O]ne of the mixed blessings of being twenty and twenty-one and even twenty-three is the conviction that nothing like this, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, has ever happened before.

~Joan Didion

I don't think anybody feels like they're a good parent. Or if people think they're good parents, they ought to think again.

~Joan Didion

Anything worth having has its price.

~Joan Didion

To shift the structure of a sentence alters the meaning of that sentence, as definitely and inflexibly as the position of a camera alters the meaning of the object photographed.

~Joan Didion

Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.

~Joan Didion

The ability to think for one's self depends upon one's mastery of the language.

~Joan Didion

In the early years, you fight because you don't understand each other. In the later years, you fight because you do.

~Joan Didion

I don't know what I think until I write it down.

~Joan Didion

Late afternoon on the West Coast ends with the sky doing all its brilliant stuff.

~Joan Didion

I have already lost touch with a couple of people I used to be

~Joan Didion

Was there ever in anyone's life span a point free in time, devoid of memory, a night when choice was any more than the sum of all the choices gone before?

~Joan Didion

A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his own image.

~Joan Didion

The fancy that extraterrestrial life is by definition of a higher order than our own is one that soothes all children, and many writers.

~Joan Didion

Another thing I need to do, when I'm near the end of the book, is sleep in the same room with it...Somehow the book doesn't leave you when you're asleep right next to it.

~Joan Didion

Was it only by dreaming or writing that I could find out what I thought?

~Joan Didion

The minute you start putting words on paper you're eliminating possibilities.

~Joan Didion

In the absence of a natural disaster we are left again to our own uneasy devices.

~Joan Didion

We are the stories we tell ourselves

~Joan Didion

When the ground starts moving, all bets are off.

~Joan Didion

Time is the school in which we learn.

~Joan Didion

Let me tell you one thing about why writers write: had I known the answer to any of these questions I would never have needed to write a novel.

~Joan Didion

Novels are like paintings, specifically watercolors. Every stroke you put down you have to go with. Of course you can rewrite, but the original strokes are still there in the texture of the thing.

~Joan Didion

Keepers of private notebooks are a different breed altogether, lonely and resistant rearrangers of things, anxious malcontents, children afflicted apparently at birth with some presentiment of loss.

~Joan Didion

My first notebook was a Big Five tablet, given to me [at age five] by my mother with the sensible suggestion that I stop whining and learn to amuse myself by writing down my thoughts.

~Joan Didion

any compulsion tries to justify itself.

~Joan Didion

I wanted to be an oceanographer, actually. It's a way of going underwater. I've always been interested in how deep it was, you know.

~Joan Didion

Details are our business as writers. Your heart leaps when you see a detail that can go somewhere

~Joan Didion

The past could be jettisoned . . . but seeds got carried.

~Joan Didion

Read, learn, work it up, go to the literature. Information is control.

~Joan Didion

Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it.

~Joan Didion

People tend to forget that my presence runs counter to their best interests. And it always does. That is one last thing to remember. Writers are always selling somebody out.

~Joan Didion

Water is important to people who do not have it, and the same is true of control.

~Joan Didion

When I'm working on a book, I constantly retype my own sentences. Every day I go back to page one and just retype what I have. It gets me into a rhythm.

~Joan Didion

We write to discover what we think.

~Joan Didion

Innocence ends when one is stripped of the delusion that one likes oneself.

~Joan Didion

It is easy to see the beginnings of things, and harder to see the ends.

~Joan Didion

You have to pick the places you don't walk away from.

~Joan Didion

I'm totally in control of this tiny, tiny world right there at the typewriter.



~Joan Didion

To have that sense of one's intrinsic worth which constitutes self-respect is potentially to have everything.

~Joan Didion

Americans are uneasy with their possessions, guilty about power, all of which is difficult for Europeans to perceive because they are themselves so truly materialistic, so versed in the uses of power.

~Joan Didion

When we start deceiving ourselves into thinking not that we want something... but that it is a moral imperative that we have it, that is when we join the fashionable madmen.

~Joan Didion

I know why we try to keep the dead alive: we try to keep them alive in order to keep them with us.

~Joan Didion

One thing in my defense, not that it matters: I know something Carter never knew, or Helene, or maybe you. I know what "nothing" means, and keep on playing.

~Joan Didion

The impulse to write things down is a peculiarly compulsive one, inexplicable to those who do not share it

~Joan Didion

We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images.

~Joan Didion

Some of us who live in arid parts of the world think about water with a

reverence others might find excessive.

~Joan Didion

I don't write for catharsis; I have to write to understand.

~Joan Didion

Marriage is memory, marriage is time.

~Joan Didion

Somehow writing has always seemed to me to have an element of performance.

~Joan Didion

To believe in 'the greater good' isto operate, necessarily, in a certain ethical suspension.

~Joan Didion

Only the dying man can tell how much time he has left.

~Joan Didion

I've never been keen on open adoption. It doesn't seem to solve the main problem with adoption, which is that somebody feels she was abandoned by someone else.

~Joan Didion

California is a place in which a boom mentality and a sense of Chekhovian loss meet in uneasy suspension.

~Joan Didion

What makes Iago evil? Some people ask. I never ask.

~Joan Didion

I learned early to keep death in my line of sight, keep it under surveillance, keep it on cleared ground and away from any brush where

it might coil unnoticed.

~Joan Didion

New York was no mere city. It was instead an infinitely romantic notion.

~Joan Didion

I think nobody owns the land until their dead are in it.

~Joan Didion

Hand that on parting squeezes your shoulder, salutes the small of your back.

~Joan Didion

Writers are only rarely likable.

~Joan Didion

Everything goes. I am working very hard at not thinking about how everything goes.

~Joan Didion

It is hard for people who have not lived in Los Angeles to realize how radically the Santa Ana figures in the local imagination. ... The wind shows us how close to the edge we are.

~Joan Didion

I know what the fear is. The fear is not for what is lost. What is lost is already in the wall. What is lost is already behind the locked doors. The fear is for what is still to be lost.

~Joan Didion

Vegas is the most extreme and allegorical of American settlements, bizarre and beautiful in its venality and in its devotion to immediate gratification.

~Joan Didion

There's a lot of landscape I never would have described if I hadn't been homesick. The impulse was nostalgia.

~Joan Didion

If you aren't aware of the reader, you're working in a vacuum.

~Joan Didion

New York is full of people . . . with a feeling for the tangential adventure, the risky adventure, the interlude that's not likely to end in any double-ring ceremony.

~Joan Didion

California: The west coast of Iowa.

~Joan Didion

The apparent ease of California life is an illusion, and those who believe the illusion will live here in only the most temporary way.

~Joan Didion

Why do you always have to be right. Why do you always have to have the last word. For once in your life just let it go.

~Joan Didion

Grief, when it comes, is nothing like we expect it to be.

~Joan Didion

There's a point when you go with what you've got. Or you don't go.

~Joan Didion

We imagined we knew everything the other thought, even when we did not necessarily want to know it, but in fact, I have come to see, we knew not the smallest fraction of what there was to know.

~Joan Didion

I am a writer. Imagining what someone would say or do comes to me as naturally as breathing.

~Joan Didion

I always want everything read in one sitting. If they can't read it in one sitting, you're going to lose the rhythm of it. You're going to lose the shape of it.

~Joan Didion

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