



The Mercy Papers

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From the critically acclaimed author of *The Mother Garden* comes a stirring and intimate memoir about the three weeks before her mother's death.

The Mercy Papers Details

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From Reader Review The Mercy Papers for online ebook

Laura M. says

This was heartwrenching to read. While it would be easy to say that this writer was being selfish by examining the full range of her own emotions as her mother lay dying, I think the act of publishing the story of her raw feelings is the greatest, most self-less gift she could have given to any one of us losing a parent. As the mourners, we know that we are supposed to behave ourselves, and turn our minds only to the suffering we see before us. But this writer has reached deep within herself to expose those quieter hurts, the ones that exist but are rarely seen during a time of loss. For sharing it so openly with us, Ms. Robin Romm is brave; that she does it with such skill is wondrous.

Kelli says

Well written. Interesting but kind of heavy; not a pick-me-up kind of book. Then again, I never expected it to be...still it kind of weighs on my emotions. Gut-wrenching in parts. Very good at conveying what it feels like to lose a loved one. Was hard to read in parts--I relived my own experience in bits and pieces through this book. It was nothing if not accurate.

Roberta says

My mother was nothing like Jackie Romm. I am nothing like Robin Romm. My relationship with my mother was nothing like Robin's with Jackie. My mother was not sick with cancer for 9 long years, only 15 months. I didn't feel the great affinity for these women that I thought I would. And just when I thought this book hadn't affected me nearly as much as I had expected it to, when I finished my bedtime reading last night, I cried my eyes out before I fell asleep.

My mother was 67 when she died. I was 29. "I listened to women talk about the pain of losing their mothers at eighty, ninety, ninety-eight. I wrung my hands and kept very quiet, afraid that I would begrudge them their grief since they'd had so much time to be daughters." No matter your age or hers, your mother is always your mother and you are always her daughter. Grief has no age limit.

Afterthought: I don't get the title at all.

Adele Stratton says

(2 and a half stars, I guess.) I was annoyed with Romm throughout this short memoir written primarily about the weeks-long period as her mother slowly succumbed to a 9-year battle with breast cancer. I kept reading because I expected Romm would somehow redeem herself. Although she presents her mother as fiercely intelligent, independent and brave, we can hardly say the same about her daughter. I found Romm's denial, self-absorption and selfishness appalling, especially on the last day of her mother's life, when she convinces her physician-father to withhold pain medication from a clearly suffering woman, so she maybe-maybe-

might have more of her real mother (as opposed to a “foggy, drugged up” one) for a longer time. She writes eloquently but, oh my goodness, a 28-year-old woman should be a little more independent and grounded than what she shows us here (and I feel qualified to speak to this since I lost my own mother to cancer when I was 28.) That 3 years later when she writes the conclusion to this memoir, she expresses no regrets, just more about how hard the loss is for her, well... I have no words.

Corinne says

I first learned of this book via an Entertainment Weekly "Best Books of 2009" list, which I perused while I was sitting in an ICU ward trying to distract myself from the fact that it was looking more and more certain that my reality would soon match up with Romm's. My own mom's passing was very sudden, so I can't say that I could identify with absolutely everything in here - the hospice care experience, for one, which makes up a sizable portion of the book - but I can say that, more than anything else, I was so, so grateful for anything that made me feel a little less alone at that time, and *The Mercy Papers* did that. It's honest to the point of being unsettling about the experience of death, and I suspect that readers who prefer silver linings won't see the value in telling the whole truth about the messiness of it all, but it was a godsend for me.

Kelley says

Read this one in less than a night. Couldn't put it down. I think some people might think it masochistic, but there's something deeply comforting about reading a story that feels so much like my own story - different details, yet same confusing, wrenching struggle. And in the end, she gives good advice that most people are too afraid to give: 'it will never leave you.' And claims, rightfully so, that there's comfort in that, and there, oddly, is. Beautiful beautiful book. Made me thankful at times that my mother's death played out the way it did (she did with all of us around her and talking to you) but regretting that it played out the way it did (it happened so fast, no time for the myriad conversations I'm still longing to have with her.) And funny to read this book nearly 6 months to the date that she died. Though, I find so many things funny and strange and coincidental these days...

Leigh Hancock says

My friend Mateo had a good point when he asked why I even read this book. I dunno. "Nothing better to do" doesn't really have the ring of truth. Maybe it was the popsicle sticks on the cover. Whatever the reason, I regretted it immensely--so much that I kept reading, hoping it would get better. It didn't. It's not so much that the writing is bad (although it's a bit MLA-stylized)...it's rather that the writer is so venomous toward almost everyone and especially toward the somewhat hapless hospice nurse who, you get the sense, probably has her OWN story to tell about X patient's witch of a daughter. Now the question is--why am I spending more time writing this review?

Mary Kruft says

This is a brutally honest account of a young woman's loss of her mother to cancer. Her mother suffered for

about 8 years and Robin, the author, shares details many people are afraid to share. I had some issues with her dislike of the Hospice care her mom & family received. I work for an outstanding Hospice organization and our nurses & social workers are truly angels on earth. Perhaps Robin's care providers were just not what she needed at that time. It is never easy to lose a parent, especially at Robin's young age, and her last chapter is the best of the entire book. She goes to a support group for those who have lost a parent and meets women who are mourning the loss of a 70, 80, or 90 -year old mother. She is bitter that she was "unable to be a daughter" longer and rightfully so. I loved that line. It is so very true. You lose a "role" when your parent dies and the loss never goes away, you learn to live with it. I would recommend this book for anyone who has lost a parent or wants to understand what a good friend might be going through in taking care of a terminally ill parent, but know that the writing is painfully honest. I hope Robin is able to enjoy the rich life she has found now.

Christine says

When I pick up a memoir, my intent is to open myself up to another person's experience, not to judge it. I wasn't driven 'The Mercy Papers' based on the subject matter, but because I was curious about her agent. Perhaps that changes my perspective.

Romm writes like the MFA she is, weaving word-pictures of environment and settings. Unfortunately, she's not quite so apt with her character depictions. While it's difficult, when one has written a memoir, to avoid labels like 'narcissist' or 'selfish', I suspect Romm's lack of depth in her depiction of her significant other, childhood friend, and her mother's partners contribute to this problem.

There are honest moments in Romm's journey: anger, self-pity and some good ole Freudian projection. Grief is a messy, politically incorrect, and individualized process. Many people who are drawn to Romm's tale have suffered great losses themselves, and they tend to compare their bereavement to hers. Such an analysis only serves to create a limited concept of the 'right' way to grieve, a nonexistent dichotomy and patently unfair to everyone involved.

In the end, my rating isn't a reflection on Romm's experience, but how she chose to express it, which is to say, void of the self-reflection that develops over time. It's also indicative of my lack of emotional response to Romm, which is not to say that others won't be significantly and positively affected.

Grace Sutherlin says

Having just recently lost my father who was relatively young to a rare form of lymphoma, I was interested in reading this book to see how the author approached the topic of grief and death in a memoir. Wow. This book is the raw, unvarnished truth about losing a parent. Even when you know someone's death is coming soon, it's gut-wrenching. It truly is what I call a "crazy-making" time or at least it was for me. From coping with watching a parent slowly be consumed by cancer, to Hospice, a DNR, a bedside vigil, the often insensitive nature of people following a death, and coping with the fallout of what is left behind after a parent dies, this author nails the concepts of death and grief. Absolutely stunning book that I will keep on my shelf of books and highly recommend to others who may be facing similar circumstances.

Jodi says

I have no idea if this book is as good as I deemed it to be, because it was, for me, essentially an autobiography. To a tee.

Travel Writing says

When my brother was dying, one way I had to tether myself was to pretend to be someone watching from the ceiling. What would that person say about what was unfolding in the moment in the house where my brother was struggling for independence when half his body had left the building, where my mom was politely trying to ignore that we needed help- which involved allowing in hospice. Strangers, mind you! And I was driving 7 hours one way to roll joints for my brother while sitting on pickle buckets on the back porch, because my brother wouldn't do drugs in our parents house. Even while he was dying.

It got ugly. Sometimes a polite struggle of wills, sometimes sheer banshee level power struggles involving ego, and pain, and fear, and the terror of watching someone we love leave us so quickly.

In the end, what we were all doing was trying desperately to do the best for my brother and sometimes turning on one another while we did it. Other times we worked together like a well oiled machine of death.

I distinctly remember someone pulling a pan of aptly named funeral potatoes out of the fridge and putting it on the counter. My sister, dad, nieces, and I ate out of the cold tinfoil pan, standing at the counter, while taking turns going and sitting with my brother. We passed the fork on to whoever strolled up.

Death is not fucking pretty. In our culture- we are almost inured to death. So when it comes to roost in our homes- we have very few skills and practice surrounding how to be present while someone we love dies.

Reading The Mercy Papers is like being the person watching from the ceiling.

This story is bone crushingly painful and there are moments you will scream, "WTF are you doing?", but the reality for me is, Robin Romm is brave enough to share her journey of the three weeks before her mother died. She tells it as it is, she doesn't make it glossy and a LifeTime movie. Because death at home is very rarely played out amongst people who have showered everyday.

Rae says

I don't know, it's not that it was a bad book... I think I'm just mad because I'm never going to find someone who went through EXACTLY what I went through/am going through during and following the death of my own mother. There were parts I really identified with, but it just didn't grab me the way I thought it would. I guess it's different for everybody and nobody's going to write my story except for me.

Cheryl Strayed says

This is a beautiful book. Romm is a fabulous writer.

Heather Barbieri says

a fearless, fierce portrait of the process of grief
