



## A Box of Darkness: The Story of a Marriage

*Sally Ryder Brady*

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*In the tradition of Joan Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking, comes a poignant memoir about a marriage that was as deep and strong as it was mysterious and complex*

Upton and Sally Brady were a rare breed: cultivated and elegant, they lived a life of literary glamour and high expectations. Sally a debutante; Upton a classics major from Harvard, they met at the Boston Cotillion. He was articulate, witty, and worldly, and he danced like Fred Astaire. How could she resist? Despite raising four children on Upton's modest wage as the editor-in-chief of the Atlantic Monthly Press, theirs was a world of champagne, sailboats, private islands, famous writers, family rituals, and ice-cold martinis. They lived life on their terms. But as time wore on, Upton, the charming and brilliant husband, the inventive, beguiling partner, grew opinionated, cranky, controlling, and dangerous.

When Upton died suddenly one evening in their Vermont cottage, Sally began uncovering secrets. As she went through his papers, she discovered that her husband of forty-six years had desired the love of other men. Her riveting, charismatic husband was not quite the man he appeared to be, and a year of mourning became for Sally a time to unravel the dark and unexpected web he had left behind. Hers is a moving and powerful story of coming to terms with what cannot be changed. It is also a story of great love.

## A Box of Darkness: The Story of a Marriage Details

Date : Published February 1st 2011 by St. Martin's Press (first published January 22nd 2011)

ISBN : 9780312654160

Author : Sally Ryder Brady

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography Memoir, Marriage, Biography

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## From Reader Review A Box of Darkness: The Story of a Marriage for online ebook

### Darlene says

This was a very honest and at times, an uncomfortable and painful memoir to read. Written by Sally Ryder Brady about her relationship with her husband, Upton, this memoir alternates between the past (when they first met and the course of their relationship) and comes back to the present where Sally is learning how to deal with her life as a widow.

While going through some of Upton's belongings after his death, Sally discovers something which is very shocking to her and leaves her questioning whether Upton truly loved her and wondering how she can go on. This memoir is the account of Sally's struggle to join the seeming two separate lives of her late husband together to find something that makes sense and allows her peace of mind. The result is a very poignant story which left me full of admiration for Sally Brady and her grace and courage. Her story leaves you with a question I have thought about many times... how much can you truly know another human being... no matter how close you feel you are to them?

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### Philip says

This is one of those memoirs that most likely served as a cathartic experience for its writer, and is of such a personal nature that, while one can thus understand the writing of it, one really can't understand the need to *publish* it. Barely five pages into her narrative the author recalls an act of physical intimacy with her husband so personal that I think I actually recoiled from the page: *Too much information, lady*, I thought, *What made you think anyone needed to know that?*

One of the questions the author asks herself repeatedly towards the end of this story is, Would her husband have wanted her to write it? I sincerely doubt it, and he'd have wanted even less for her to publish it. And apparently her four grown children didn't object to her writing or publishing it.

And like so many memoirs today, it carries a disclaimer: "This is a true story, though some of the names have been changed."

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### Angie says

This book is a wonderful reminder to me of what my dear and amazing friend , Diane, and I so often talk about - " Everyone has a story " . This is Sally Ryder Brady's story .

My three star rating only reflects my humble opinion of the book , it's cover , the writing style , etc . Sally Ryder Brady's " story " deserves a 5 star rating .

Her " story " told on the written page through timelines , events and other characters really is much deeper than any written word . It is HER story and speaks volumes about who SHE really is .

Married to an alcoholic , closet gay man for 46 years and living through all his bullshit baggage that he dumped on her and their 4 children would have made most of us have a very different " story " to tell . Hers however is a story of love and total acceptance of another .

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### **Jill says**

I'm always grateful to Goodreads First Reads to have the privilege of reading a pre-pub book. I gravitated to this one because of the publisher's comparisons to Joan Didion's *Year of Magical Thinking*, a lyrical, unflinching highly introspective book about the death of Didion's husband, John Gregory Dunne.

This is not that book.

Sally Ryder Brady -- the long-time wife of Upton Brady, the editor-in-chief of *Atlantic Monthly Press* -- lived in a rarefied world of famous writers and parties, sailboats and elegance. Inexplicably, Sally -- who comes across as a very likable person -- only touches on this world, without carefully exploring the juxtaposition of the public Upton Brady and the private man.

The private man is a closeted gay man (or, perhaps, bisexual) and Sally is shocked - SHOCKED! -- to develop the secret stash of porn after his death. However, there are ample hints that Upton Brady is gay, including his own admission to her about his forays with a family friend, early on in the marriage. Upton Brady is also displayed to be a raging alcoholic, narcissistic, selfish (although Sally has born him several children, he piggishly states that his earnings are "my money"), abjectly cruel, and emotionally abusive. Yet Sally eulogizes their marriage and this book is described as a "story of great love."

In addition, in an all-too-familiar tale, Upton Brady is forced by the rigid and judgmental tenets of the church to feel that he is "sinning" by embracing who he really is -- and, in fact, "sinning" with premarital sex (although substance abuse, of course, is fine). Rather than explore the paradox of a "loving church" that forces people into self-hatred (by the laws of man, not God), Sally never casts her eye on this diachotomy.

I was left with feeling that this was a mildly titillating read that did little to explore the big picture, and never fully convinced that it was "worth it" to remain in this marriage. I wish I could write a more favorable review.

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### **Diane S ? says**

While I was reading the first half of the book I thought Sally Brady was either stupid or a saint. Upton Brady was in turn either delightful to be around or destructive. But by the end of the book I applauded her courage in staying in a marriage that was difficult to say the least and in finding a way to get her husband to accept help for his problems, while finding herself and helping her come to terms with her marriage. She loved him with an unconditional love and it is just sad that he was incapable of knowing or feeling this.

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### **Sherry says**

I just finished this book. Once I started reading I didn't want to quit till I finished it. The story draws you in. It is a story about marriage and betrayal. A story about finding out that you don't really know the person you thought you knew best. An excellent book.

I received an advanced reading copy of this book through Goodreads.

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### **Stephanie says**

I got this book as a Goodreads First Read.

It was fascinating. Like watching a train wreck fascinating.

In the beginning, I wasn't sure exactly what it was that drew Sally to Upton other than the fact that the dancing was magnificent. (She admits there were red flags during their courtship.) By the end, I got the sense that the other things she loved about him she loved simply because they had been together so long. But she did love him, and the way she tells her story is lovely in a way that is hard to explain ... I guess I simply liked her prose. Her voice drew me in and I gobbled this book up (despite the fact that I felt she was kind of a door mat).

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### **Cynthia says**

Very well written and certainly held my interest - but there were times in the middle when I took a real dislike to the author. If you are afraid for your children - not physically but emotionally - is it really a good idea to stay married? It would be interesting to have their take on things. I also found it hard to believe that she was surprised, after her husband's death, to find out that he was either gay or bisexual - after all, he admitted during their marriage to having sex with another man. And finding out, the first thing she does is call up each of her four (grown) children and tell them, seemingly to be more interested in her emotions than the impact on them. Still, I'm glad I read it

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### **April says**

This is another in those bitter modern memoirs that are circulating now, but better written than most. The gist of it is that Sally Ryder Brady married and had 5 children with (SPOILER ALERT) a man, who became a prominent editor of The Atlantic Monthly, who she realizes after his death was either bisexual or gay but unable to accept his homosexuality. Still, I kept getting an uneasy feeling throughout the book...she seemed just too good to be true (verbally and emotionally abused by her mother and later her husband, she just takes it all on the chin and keeps it together for the kids). She keeps talking about how much she loved him and she quotes friends reassuring her that he loved her...but then why would she write this expose about a fact of his nature he desperately tried to hide even from himself? And then there's the fact which she makes much of that his therapist for a decade never even knew he had had homosexual affairs...but she, his wife, knew. I'm glad she wrote about the good times as well as the bad, but I guess I'm not sure why she wrote it.

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### **Bekah says**

I received this book as A First Reads giveaway. I enjoyed the book, though I think the author sold herself short. I was left wondering why she remained in her marriage for so long when she really only presented a

cursory and superficial description of her husband's good qualities. He was presented in a very negative light. I was left feeling--not that they had a deep and complex marriage--but rather that she was a weak and co-dependent woman who chose to ignore major warning signs in her attempts to "stand by her man."

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### **Christina says**

I received Sally Ryder Brady's book *A Box of Darkness: The Story of a Marriage* for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Sally Ryder Brady's *A Box of Darkness: The Story of a Marriage* offers a glimpse into the lives of two fascinating individuals who share a deep love and enduring friendship, as well as a passionate commitment to making their partnership work. The author brings you on a tumultuous ride that is the story of her life with Upton Brady, a victim of a conservative upbringing, strict religious beliefs, self-deprecating tendencies, and his own time. Any reader can easily relate to the ups and downs of Sally and Upton's relationship, work, money, alcohol, and in-laws being the primary factors contributing to the low points. Despite Upton's lifelong struggle with his closeted homosexuality, he lived a long and full life, now immortalized through his wife's writing.

Sally Ryder Brady is an excellent story teller. She recounts her past in a way that is riveting through both the exceptional moments and the mundane. The prose in this work is fluid and the jumps in the timeline are easy to follow and thoughtfully executed. Exciting times in the American art and literary scene are shared with readers through very personal experiences, and intimate moments are shared in an open and genuine manner.

My only complaint with this work is the title. There are positive and negative aspects to every experience, every individual, every marriage, and every family. Despite the quote at the end of the first chapter, *A Box of Darkness: The Story of a Marriage* implies something quite negative. Not only does it sound like the title of a low-budget made-for-TV movie about a husband hiring a hit man to kill his wife, it suggests constant abuse and isolation, not years of family, love, and support. At one point during her grieving, the narrator expresses that she is living with rupture and suggests that this would be a good title for a best-seller. *Living with Rupture: The Story of a Marriage* would be a fitting title for this work, a metaphor for Sally's loss as well as Upton's dual life.

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### **Victoria Whipple says**

This was a title I got through Goodreads First reads, and I put off reading it because it's not my usual fare. As a school librarian, I usually read children's and YA books, and if I actually read a "grown-up" book, I usually prefer fiction. But having devoured *Sapphique* and not being prepared with another book I picked up "Box of Darkness", and I didn't want to put it down. Sally Ryder Brady has written a story of the marriage to her husband of 45 years. After his death, she used the writing process to help her deal with her grief and unanswered questions she had about her husband and her marriage. Each chapter of the book opens with current day happenings; her discovery of her husband's body, the memorial service, visits with friends (including the one where her friend encouraged her to write it all down). The balance of the chapter recounts her courtship with and marriage to Upton Brady. As anyone who has been married for any length of time

knows, a marriage has its ups and downs. During her time married to alcoholic Upton who was a slave to his routines, Sally had many deep disappointments and crises, and even her day to day living was often done in the shadow of Upton's moods and anger. Despite all their problems, Sally stuck with her Upton and was able to fulfill her wedding day prayer to "make this marriage work." Not a storybook romance--although publicly it appeared to be--but a memorial to a marriage and Sally Ryder Brady's one true love.

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### **Susan says**

Sorry, this book was not for me. I felt it was slightly disingenuous for the author to proclaim love and admiration for her deceased husband then write an intimate exposé about his alcoholism and bisexuality/homosexuality, while presenting herself as a mostly normal wife and mother. I guess I missed something as most people who read this book gave it high ratings.

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### **Karlene says**

**WARNING: LOTS OF SPOILERS.**

I absolutely enjoyed reading this book because the author is quite adept at telling a story, and has a gift for detail. She definitely transports the reader to the particular time and place, and I thought the subject matter was absolutely compelling. That being said, I found Mrs. Ryder Brady's reaction to her husband disclosing to her that he had slept with another man to be disingenuous, perplexing and downright idiotic. She literally packed her skis and took off for the slopes. Then apparently nothing ever gets said about it for years and years and years, then she purports to be surprised when she discovers his stash of pornographic magazines after his death. She also reminisces about noticing he changed his swim shorts to "fig leaves" after she told him that she realized their vacation beach was a gay beach. Another factoid: two of her husband's siblings were gay. Somehow, none of this registered or set off alarm bells? Even more unbelievable is the fact that after years and years of therapy the subject never came up on EITHER spouse's part during these myriad individual therapy sessions. How could the psychotherapist have actually helped either of them when they were aggressively burying one of the root causes of the problems in their marriage? I also find it odd that her children would allow the mother to publish such an exposé about their father, after his death, when he was unable to defend himself. It's all rather strange. Despite all of these holes, I still rate the book 4 stars because the book was fast paced, well written and worth a read. Upton was certainly an interesting man.

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### **Roseana says**

This book was mildly interesting for its description of a time gone by, when good girls from Northeast Protestant families went "bad" by dating outside their denominations, dropped out of Barnard to become someone's secretary, took acting classes and did one year of summer stock, got emotionally steamrolled by their awful, borderline personality disorder mothers, and then, their husbands. This story is probably entertaining for the seersucker suit set, many of whom must know the Bradys by reputation (Upton Brady having been a figure on the Atlantic Monthly books and magazine scene); their worst suspicions about this couple have been confirmed at last. But ultimately, Ms. Brady's lack of finesse with writing mechanics hampers her ability to go beyond her mere recollections and into something that's both literary and meaningful.

