



Remembering the Music, Forgetting the Words: Travels with Mom in the Land of Dementia

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From the author of the much-loved memoir *Cottage for Sale, Must Be Moved* comes an engaging and inspiring account of a daughter who must face her mother's premature decline.

In *Remembering the Music, Forgetting the Words*, Kate Whouley strips away the romantic veneer of mother-daughter love to bare the toothed and tough reality of caring for a parent who is slowly losing her mind. Yet, this is not a dark or dour look at the demon of Alzheimer's. Whouley shares the trying, the tender, and the sometimes hilarious moments in meeting the challenge also known as Mom.

As her mother, Anne, falls into forgetting, Kate remembers for her. In Anne we meet a strong-minded, accidental feminist with a weakness for unreliable men. The first woman to apply for—and win—a department-head position in her school system, Anne was an innovative educator who poured her passion into her work. House-proud too, she made certain her Hummel figurines were dusted and arranged just so. But as her memory falters, so does her housekeeping. Surrounded by stacks of dirty dishes, piles of laundry, and months of unopened mail, Anne needs Kate's help—but she doesn't want to relinquish her hard-won independence any more than she wants to give up smoking.

Time and time again, Kate must balance Anne's often nonsensical demands with what she believes are the best decisions for her mother's comfort and safety. This is familiar territory for anyone who has had to help a loved one in decline, but Kate finds new and different ways to approach her mother and her forgetting. Shuddering under the weight of accumulating bills and her mother's frustrating, circular arguments, Kate realizes she must push past difficult family history to find compassion, empathy, and good humor.

When the memories, the names, and then the words begin to fade, it is the music that matters most to Kate's mother. Holding hands after a concert, a flute case slung over Kate's shoulder, and a shared joke between them, their relationship is healed—even in the face of a dreaded and deadly diagnosis. "Memory," Kate Whouley writes, "is overrated."

Remembering the Music, Forgetting the Words: Travels with Mom in the Land of Dementia Details

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From Reader Review Remembering the Music, Forgetting the Words: Travels with Mom in the Land of Dementia for online ebook

Jacki says

Grab your tissues and favorite James Galway music and prepare to laugh and cry through Kate Whouley's (Cottage for Sale, Must Be Moved) narrative of the challenges and rewards inherent in caring for a parent with Alzheimer's disease, as well as the power of music to heal our souls.

Whouley's story begins with the release of her first book, which her mother declares an acceptable substitute for grandchildren. An ominous note underscores the joy as Whouley describes their blissful ignorance in the time before her mother began showing early symptoms of Alzheimer's. Soon Whouley's life becomes a whirlwind of caring for her mother, educating herself about the disease and stretching to afford the cost of assisted living. On top of navigating the exhausting practical matters, Whouley faces the emotional torture of watching her mother transform from the brilliant, successful woman she knew into a forgetful, angry echo of her former self. Through all the pain and pitfalls, Whouley finds solace through making music with the flute her mother bought her in grade school.

While the subject signals a potential sob story, Whouley gracefully keeps a balance between poignancy and humor. Her intelligent, sensitive voice is a treat whether she relates her philosophy, a funny anecdote or a heart-wrenching decision. Her explanation that Alzheimer's helped her relationship with her mother in some ways is a monument to humanity's power to see blessings even in curses. Readers may expect this book to break their hearts but also to uplift them.

This review originally appeared in Shelf Awareness Readers Edition. Sign up for this free and awesome newsletter at <http://www.shelf-awareness.com> for the latest news and reviews! This review refers to an ARC provided by Shelf Awareness.

Daphne says

A moving account of a single daughter's complex relationship with her mother--before and after her mother succumbs to Alzheimer's disease. The book is big-hearted and honest--and often as humorous as it is sad. It's a chronicle of small-town life, of being an avocational musician, of coming to grips with events that are more powerful than we are. A compelling read.

Anne says

I received this book thru the Goodreads Giveaway program. I put it aside for a bit, because I knew it would be a difficult read for me. Kate Whouley has lived my life! So much of her journey is exactly the same as mine. Reading it from her point of view was not only validating and uplifting, it was so, so true to real life.

When I learned my own mother had dementia, I changed my life around to take care of her. My Irish, unemotional, heavy-drinking mother and I had never been good friends. But I was 40 and unmarried, and able to take care of her. I am a warm-hearted, easy going entertainer who traveled in the theatre. Finding her

unable to pay her bills and the house a mess, she admitted that things weren't right with her. After getting great advice from area professionals, we prepared a course of action. It wasn't any fun. Others' tales of the beautiful relationship of mother and daughter coming to terms with Alzheimers is not my story.

During this process - putting on my mother's shoes and washing her clothes, driving her to appointments - she was childlike and sweet, and funny. I felt as though I was closer to her than I had been in all of my adult life. Finally, she was agreeable. Although I was almost forced to spend time with her, it's time I never would have spent if I didn't have to. In a way, I'm so grateful.

The only difference between my story and Ms. Whouley's, is that when my mother died (of cancer 2 years after her dementia diagnosis) I did not cry for very long. I actually felt euphoric. I felt guilty about being so happy, but there it is. I'm so grateful for my time with her at the end of her life - it brought us together, but I was eager to move on.

Please read this book.

M says

This book is as excellent as I had hoped it would be. It reads like a good story and you feel like you are sitting right there with Kate hearing her tell the story. She deals with the difficult challenges of having a mother with early stage dementia not with as a sad story, but with laughter, grace, and funny moments as well as hard times. The chapters are a just right length and I can't put it down. I will sad when I finish it.

S.C. says

Memoirs about terminal disease are hard to read. I think readers are drawn to them because they want to know if they have what it takes to cope with such difficult circumstances. I also think they read them in the hopes that someone who has gone through it can serve as a good example of what to do and what not to do. And while "Remembering The Music, Forgetting The Words" tells an important story of such a struggle, it fails to be a bigger success in its genre due to lack of depth and a writing style that takes no risks.

The book is straightforward and succinct. There are no long drawn out passages or fancy language to skip over and it makes for a short, no-fuss read. On the same note, there isn't anything particularly magical or heartrending about it. I was not enticed to return to its pages during breaks in readings. Because Whouley is documenting the subtle progression of Alzheimer's, she often mixes in the mundane day-to-day stuff: the steps she takes to get her mother's finances in order, the simple conversations the two of them have, her struggle to live her own life while caring for an ailing/dying parent. The style in which she writes it feels less sentimental than it should. I wasn't moved by it.

Whouley doesn't reveal much about her mother or herself except small details. I would've liked to hear more about her occupation as a musician, what inspired her to play, why she chose the instrument she did, and memorable performances. I also would've liked to hear more anecdotes about her mother's occupation as a teacher, as a profession of that kind is always filled with stories. Lastly, the inclusion of photographs would've been a good idea - pictures of the memoir's author and other involved people make it more interesting and personal. The only photographs the reader gets are the cut-off picture booth photos that

border the left-hand side of the book's cover.

This is an average memoir that documents a personal story in a minimalistic fashion. Those that want lyricism and captivating writing in the memoirs they read should look elsewhere.

Kathy says

Kate Whouley has a gift for finding the 'good' in anything. Not that she doesn't also see the 'bad'. In dealing with her mother's descent into Alzheimer's, she lets you know all the sad things she has to contend with as an only child. Luckily, she has true friends & other family support. She learns to know the person her mother becomes & in so doing, learns more about herself. And yes, you cry at the end.....

Shirley says

I guess I would call myself a long-distance care-giver. My dear friend who exhibits signs of dementia has been moved to live near her daughter who lives several states away. My friend and I visit several times a week over the phone.

Kate Whouley's book helped me comprehend not only what my friend is experiencing but also why her daughter responds to her sometimes in ways I can't understand. I was upset when my friend was reprimanded by her daughter for not being able to remember her grandchildren and great-grandchildren's names. My friend told her daughter the following day that she was just kidding about not being able to remember the names. The daughter told her it wasn't funny. Does the daughter not understand dementia/Alzheimer's or is she angry that she is losing her mother and can't stop it? Is there some denial here? The author describes a visit to her mom at a care center and how the visit made her feel "worn down, sad, inadequate, and exhausted." (p. 143)

Sometimes, I get calls asking how to subtract the year of her birth from the present year to figure out how old she is. Once, she called and asked for her phone number. I told her that we don't call ourselves, so it's an easy number to forget. I'm sure her number of many years had also changed when she moved. My friend who was an amazing cook is now afraid to cook because she just can't remember how. I appreciated it when Kate Whouley explained that those suffering from memory problems often can't remember the steps needed to accomplish a task.

Kate Whouley relates something that she read many years ago that defined dementia as "soul wandering". "The soul, preparing to depart, begins leaving the body for short intervals, and these absences lead to the confusion of the mind and lack of orientation in the body that typify Alzheimer's. Medicine and neuroscience explain Alzheimer's in more concrete terms: brain plaque, lesions, missing synapses, neurotransmitters unable to connect over the deteriorating surface of the brain." (P. 128)

Kate relates that Alzheimer's patients are constantly frustrated and afraid. In response, they may blame those around them for the things that no longer make sense. My husband sometimes reminds me that when I listen to my friend, I am only hearing one side of the story.

Whouley's book was a gift to me at a time when I really needed it. I have spent countless hours trying to

understand what is happening and looking for words or suggestions that may help. I think I need to send my copy of Remembering the Music, Forgetting the Words to my friend's daughter with a note of support. Then, I need to purchase another copy for myself. It has really helped to know that there are others out there also searching for answers.

Thank you, Kate Whouley, for sharing your story.

Paula Schumm says

I listened to the audiobook. This is a memoir of a woman who is the caretaker of her mother, who has Alzheimer's disease. The best advice the author gives is to remember that Alzheimer's is predictable. It doesn't get better. Music plays a part in this book as a diversion and as an activity that brings happiness to them both. Recommended.

Lorri says

Although most of the reviews here present *Remembering the Music* as being about taking care of a loved one who has Alzheimer's Disease, to me this riveting memoir was more about the complicated dynamics of the Mother-Daughter relationship. I haven't had any direct experience caring for a parent with dementia, yet I related completely to the shifting sands atop a firm foundation that characterize the author's relationship with her mother. I found it to be ultimately uplifting. This memoir is heartfelt and real.

Ash Chamberlain says

I received "Remembering the Music, Forgetting the Words: Travels with Mom in the Land of Dementia" by Kate Whouley from a Goodreads.com giveaway. Before even touching this book I could tell by the title and cover, which is covered in photos of a mother and her young child, that this would be an emotional read, and i was right. The book outlines a few years in the life of Kate and her Fiery, Witty, and Intelligent mother. Kate and her mother have always had a complex relationship, made even more complex now by her mother's newly discovered Dementia. While Kate struggles with the hard life decisions of weather or not to move her mother in with her, or to an assisted living facility, it's also touched by moments of humor and uplifting mother-daughter moments. I got quite pulled in to this book, and immediately put myself in Kate's shoes, by the end i must say i shed some tears. I believe this will be one of those books that i will come back to in my head and think about often, i will for sure be recommending this one to my friends and family.

John says

I found reading Whouley's previous on book, about grafting the cottage she bought in another town onto her own house, gave some background, but this book can stand alone; her mom does not feature much in it, and her symptoms hadn't appeared then.

What to expect from "Music"? It's really a memoir of Whouley's life, with a focus on her relationship with her mother, rather than a strict focus on the disease itself. By the end of the book, her mother is still

functioning ok, if not great, mentally, with unrelated medical problems coming into play. I have to admit that while Kate does a good job of going into her mother's story, I wasn't all that drawn to the woman. So, though I felt for the author's situation, I'm not sure I fully appreciated her mother as sufferer (if you will). Likely that sounds harsh, but after reading the book, might be clearer what I meant.

The writing itself flows well, with Whouley effectively conveying the high and low points, neither saccharine, nor grim. Still, the book was a long read, not drawn out exactly, but perhaps a bit too much attention to detail?

As for the narration, I felt Gaffney was a very good fit as a reader -- definitely felt as though Kate were telling her story, rather than hearing it read to me.

Marti says

My mother is in middle stages of AD. I read this book in hopes of being encouraged. In found many similarities on our paths and comforting thoughts. Perhaps because of where we are in the disease process, I also experienced horror , like I was watching a train accident.

I felt somewhat betrayed at the ending which I will not spoil here, and I also found a sense of peace.

Kerry Patton says

Written with poignancy and wit, a moving and illustrative portrait of the progression of dementia...

Brian says

I was sent a galley to review and I am most grateful! What a compassionate, sympathetic, yet utterly honest look at living with, and losing a loved one to this wasting disease. For anyone who has an aging parent, this candid memoir will help soften the reality, yet steel you/us/me for the road ahead.

Vicky Titcomb says

What an amazing book! It is so very honest and so very well written. It's poignant and real right down to the toenails. Kate takes us down the journey of her mother's Alzheimers disease with incredible insight about herself, her mother and their relationship, before and after the illness. She shares the frustrations of moving from the role of daughter to caregiver, but tells the story with great empathy, honesty and even at times with a wonderful sense of humor. I would highly recommend this book to anyone, but especially to someone who has gone or is going through this experience with a relative.
