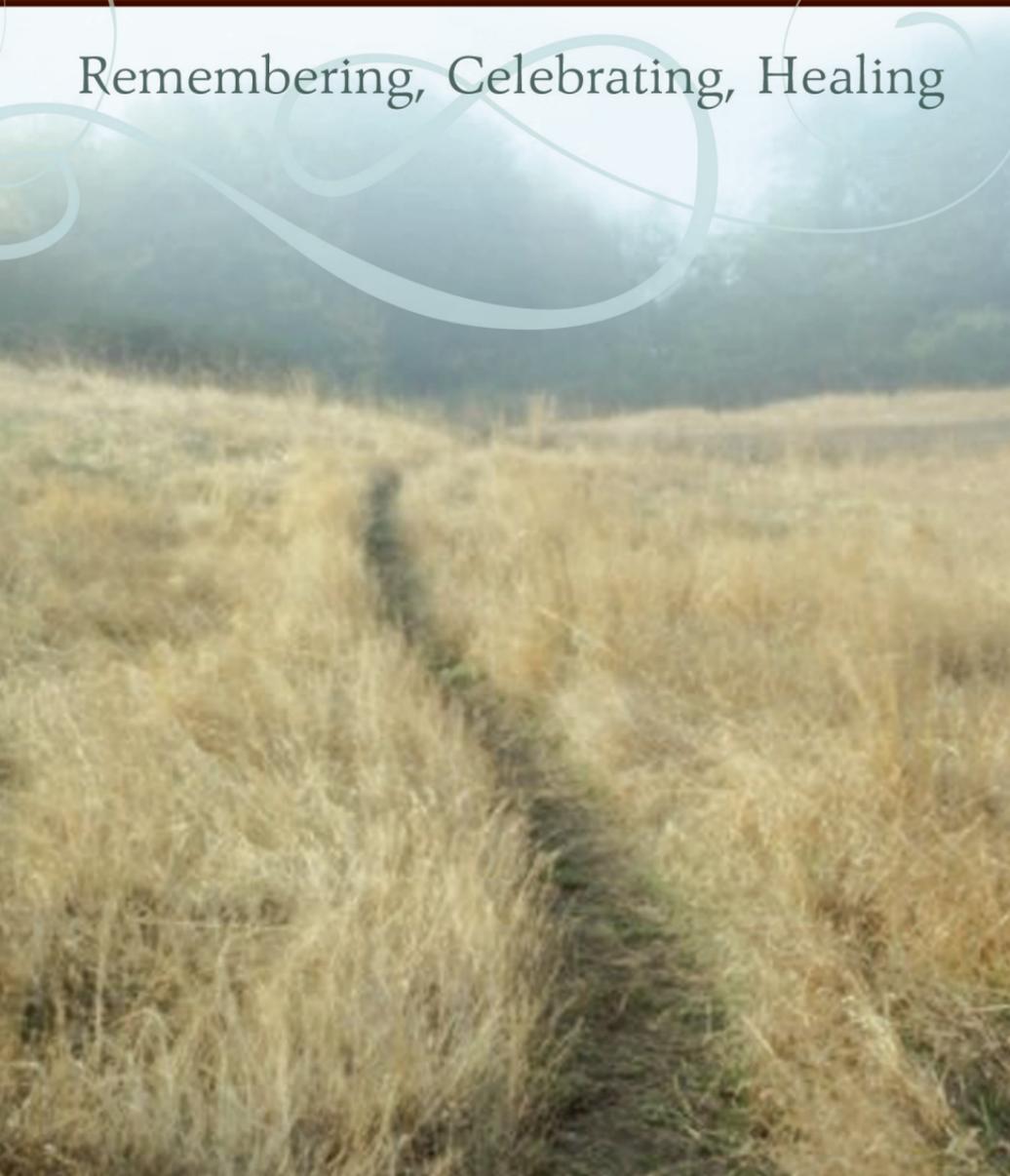


BY DEE DEE RAAP

Dear Mom

Remembering, Celebrating, Healing



Reader Reviews

“As a pastor, I walk with those who have lost their mothers to help them do the tender work of grieving, reconciliation, healing, and closure. This book offers a proven, yet simple process of healing available to everyone: simply writing to remember and connect. Dear Mom shows us how to heal by moving from despair to acceptance to joy. Grab the tissue, as you’ll cry, and laugh, first at Dee Dee’s stories, then, at your own as joyful memories flood your mind.”

Rev. Janet Forbes, Denver, CO

“What a gift! Anyone who has lost their mother will relate to the shocking numbness and depression that engulfs you. Dear Mom is a salute to all moms who share their legacies in simple and often unknown ways. Journey with the author as she celebrates the gold nuggets of wisdom she discovered through narrative healing.”

Kim Woods, CEO, Kimball, NE

“The world needs this message. If you still have the opportunity to tell someone you love how much they mean to you, tell them. Tell them now. Ask the questions that Dee Dee is now wanting answers to. You will be glad you did.”

Renée Middleton, Cheyenne, WY

“I enjoyed going through the healing journey with Dee Dee. Each letter made me realize how much I have taken my own mother for granted. I hadn’t finished the book before I sat down and wrote my own mom a letter. Thanks, Dee Dee, for reminding me how important it is to say ‘thank you’ and ‘I love you’ before it is too late.”

Lynn Vosler, Sterling, CO

“A superb achievement...Dee Dee Raap has written a book on women from a personal perspective, a unique contribution to life from childhood to motherhood to leaving a legacy. Engaging to read!”

Deanna Trowbridge, Sidney, NE

Dear Mom:

Remembering, Celebrating, Healing



Betty Hauge
May 3, 1928 - December 5, 1990

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Dedication

*To the loving memory of my mother
Betty Hauge*

*To my daughters
Jessica and Kelsey*

Thanks for a wonderful journey!

Acknowledgements

A work like *Dear Mom: Remembering, Celebrating, Healing*, is the result of support and love from many friends and family. Thanks to my friends, whose love and support I count as one of life's great gifts. Special thanks to Diane, who encouraged me from the beginning, to Renee, who shared both ideas and raw courage, and to Virginia, for her faith and wisdom and willingness to read. Thank you to Barbara Aragon, whose words "narrative healing" aptly described the effect the letters to Mom had on my life. Special thanks to Elaine who introduced me to Caron, my editor who has become my friend, who helped turn raw letters of healing into a journey of remembering and celebrating. To my family, Kim, Jessica, and Kelsey, who waited patiently, encouraged tirelessly, and whose love supported the creation of *Dear Mom: Remembering, Celebrating, Healing*, a special thank you.

In addition, to my late mom and dad, my brother, sisters, aunts, uncles and the many wonderful people whose hearts began and remain in a small, rural community in northeastern South Dakota, thank you. It truly has been a wonderful journey!

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Foreword

THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

The mother-daughter duo is one of the most powerful forces of the human experience. The physical bond and psychological connections developed between mother and daughter create strong feelings and memories that rise above separation, in life and also after the death of one or the other. Even animal research confirms this power of the mother-daughter bond, which during infancy and early childhood can modulate gene expression, neurotransmitter activity, and the hormonal pattern of the stress response. My medical practice, which cares for thousands of mothers and daughters, affirms the lasting formative and transformative impact of this relationship.

Dee Dee and her mother, Betty, model the ideal for women. By reading Dee Dee's story and letters, each reader may identify with her feelings and memories, especially those that develop around hearth and home—the domain of females since ancient times. Through Dee Dee's humorous, inspiring, and heart-wrenching letters, women may smile, laugh, cry and ache as they reflect on their own mother-daughter experiences. The mystery of the mother, an important theme in the mother-daughter duo, is shared in a sensitive letter, "Driving Mrs. Betty." Secrets shared and secrets kept often are a source of conflict and confusion for mothers and daughters, and this book may propel daughters into a process of discovery that leads to realizing

and accepting their mothers' vulnerabilities.

Dear Mom: Remembering, Celebrating, Healing portrays the many facets of communication and connections between two women. It is a tribute to the healing capacity of journaling. I personally benefited from Dee Dee sharing her journey through her letters to her mother, and I highly recommend this book to all women. It is a heart-warming affirmation of mothers' ability to instill in their daughters the timeless qualities of compassion, service, love of beauty, courage, and faith, just as Dee Dee's mother graciously portrayed and so artfully nurtured in her daughter.

Kenna Stephenson, M.D.

Author of *Awakening Athena: Resilience, Restoration, and Rejuvenation for Women*

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I ntroduction

*The experience of losing a parent in death is almost universal-
and yet many who feel this loss for the first time
are surprised at how painful it can be.
Even those well into adulthood are often taken aback
by the deep sense of loneliness, the sense of being “orphaned,”
that the death of a mother or father can bring.¹*

Reverend Richard Gilbert

Healing from the death of someone you cherish can be a painful process, especially when the special soul dies suddenly. You lose a vital connection, as a life support system, and the result is feeling like an orphan, no matter what your age.

When this happened to me, I knew that I was dying inside because I felt the time bomb going off inside of me ever so slowly. Tick... tick... tick...

A telephone call from my younger sister Gayle on that fateful day of December 5, 1990, changed my life.

“Dee Dee, the hospital just called, they don’t think that Mom is going to make it. You’d better get home right away,” she begged as she hung up very quickly. Stunned, I called back immediately, only to have her repeat the

message with even more urgency.

I was in the midst of the chaos of a kitchen remodeling job in our house, and my only seat was a bucket turned upside down on the kitchen floor. In shock, I sat on the bucket and called my brother. I couldn't think clearly. My husband Kim was traveling for work, I had two small children, and I had to get home.

The phone rang a second time, not five minutes later. Gayle called again to say that Mom did not make it. She had died suddenly of a heart attack. That was the beginning of my journey as a 34-year-old orphan.

THE SHOCK

Emptiness is the feeling I use to describe emotional numbness. Friends shared their words for loss as hollow heart, orphan, abandoned, angry, meaninglessness, or distressing. All of these are true when we lose a loved one, especially when the passing is sudden. Whether our bond is through blood, marriage, or friendship, a human heart that shares such love with another is set adrift on a shoreless wave, riding endlessly until the numbness subsides. The shift from emotional pain back to the land of the living can be foggy. Some people seem able to command their mind and body to walk out of the fog and continue with life. Others stay numbed in pain for a while. The point is that we share the same hollow heart when we lose a loved one, and we all will recover in varying degrees.

NARRATIVE HEALING

I have finally restored my wholeness through a process called narrative healing; I journeyed back through my life with my mother by writing her a series of letters, beginning

nine years after her death. This writing method healed the emptiness and was a phenomenal personal journey through time and memories.

Narrative healing works like this: when our pain is too great, the human psyche has remarkable ways to compartmentalize the intense pain, hence the numbness or other coping mechanisms. In the resilience of our human spirit, an inner knowing determines, at some point, that we can handle the grief and the pain now. This ability to handle the grieving happens automatically in this writing process, like slowly opening the door to the heart again. Then the heart says, “Okay, look at the memories, smell the freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, taste the sweet homemade ice cream, listen to the music together, and feel the love again.”

Narrative healing allows your heart to open. The truth is that our resilience is directly dependent upon facing the hurt, feeling the vulnerability, and accepting it—all the pain and joy combined—until we don’t know whether we are laughing or crying. We move through all the pent up emotions and arrive at a place of acceptance. Acceptance doesn’t mean that we don’t still feel the pain. It does imply that we can equally choose to know the depth of love and remember the good things, even demand, and claim them, from our memories.

THE DESTINATION

Arriving at this destination of acceptance and healing is a freedom that I want to share with you. *Dear Mom: Remembering, Celebrating, Healing*, is an honest journey through memories that we all have, sequenced in the progress of a healing heart and arriving at the desire to live

fully again. My form of narrative was a series of letters to Mom depicting my journey. It is my greatest wish that my narrative healing serve you in this way:

- Help you heal after the loss of a parent or another loved one.
- Offer you a way of saying goodbye.
- Offer you a way of connecting to your own past and your own stories.
- Respect your past and the memories of your loved one as I did mine through honoring my mother and her gifts to me.
- Help you understand that no matter how bad life is, there are gifts of good in it. Your job is to dig for the gold, the true meaning of the experience.

Know that the gold, the wisdom and values in our past, derive from our connections. We connect to our past and to our future through people. My journey of narrative healing began as a series of letters I wrote to my mom nine years after her death. I hope my journey gives you a laugh and a memory of your own. Mostly, I hope it gives you the chance to write your living mother a letter. Do not wait as I did to say all of these things until it is too late. Life is just too short.

Dee Dee Raap

SECTION ONE

Saying Goodbye

*I wanted a perfect ending..
Now, I've learned the hard way that some poems don't rhyme,
and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle and end.
Life is about not knowing,
having to change, taking the moment,
and making the best of it,
without knowing what's going to happen next.
Delicious ambiguity.²*

Gilda Radner

CHAPTER ONE

The Winter

*Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth
find reserves of strength
that will endure as long as life lasts.
There is something infinitely healing
in the repeated refrains of nature-
the assurance that dawn comes after night,
and spring after winter.³*

Rachel Carson

Winters in South Dakota are beautiful with fluffy snowflakes and fields of white that invite you to cross-country ski or snowmobile and suck in chilled air to rejuvenate your vitality. Snow is delightful or dreary in the winter months. The raging arctic wind descends from the North and creates blizzard conditions with blinding snow and wind chill factors that can dip to 86 degrees below zero, a temperature I experienced in December 1984. Sometimes, I think of winter as a time when nothing can live, surely a time of death.

At the time of Mom's death, my family and I were living in Pierre, South Dakota, about 200 miles from my hometown of Roslyn, where my parents Betty and Orville Hauge had lived. In my beautiful family, my husband Kim and my daughters Jessica and Kelsey provided the nurturing support that helped me survive my mother's death. Orphaned like me were my loving siblings: my older brother and two younger sisters. Despite the caring bond we hold, I do not have my mom, and I wish I did.

The first Christmas after Mom died, I attended a Lutheran church service on Christmas Eve. We picked up the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, preparing to sing. The last song of the service, entitled, "I'm So Glad Each Christmas Eve," includes these words in verse five, "When mother trims the tree each year which fills the room with light...." I had never seen that hymn in my life even though I'd been a Lutheran for a number of years. The refrain grated my raw feelings, and I ran out of church crying. The time

bomb went off.

This is how grief hits, a silent tsunami rising, seeking the shore of release. The last time I saw Mom she was in her casket. My mind reeled from the lack of closure. I couldn't talk to her. I missed her. I never said goodbye. Her death denied me those conversations that I'd have had if I'd known our time together was limited. Without those conversations, I felt deprived of any opportunity to heal. Mom was just gone, and her absence left hollowness, a huge empty hole. Nothing fills the hollow space, except perhaps a journey through time.

A JOURNEY OF MEMORIES

Dear Mom,

A journey of memories is one of the best parts of life. Journeys back in time to recall joyfully the events, moments, and activities that shaped us. A journey to a time that seemed simpler and less complicated, when you were the mom, and I was your daughter.

That's what this series of letters is all about, Mom. Your life was cut short. You died December 5, 1990, at age 62. I was only 34, and I left many things unsaid because there was not enough time. Even 34 years wasn't enough time.

These letters are a way of saying that I hope you are still listening because I have so much to tell you. I hope you enjoy the journey of memories and the place where I am at today, much to your credit, Mom. That's a compliment!

Love,

Dee Dee

I was haunted for years by not being able to say goodbye. The letters I wrote to my mom were important communication tools for my healing. All of my life, the written word facilitated my healing and helped me develop the resilience for difficult situations. Poems, essays, journals—I have written countless pages over my life, reflecting and growing through the process of writing. This form of narrative healing finally filled the hollow hole.

MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Dear Mom,

I sit on my couch next to the Christmas tree in our home in Cheyenne and look at the ornaments that you made for us. I realized that it has been nine years since I had Christmas with you. That's a long time. Your sudden, unexpected death just before the holiday was hard on me. I've spent years being unable to enjoy the spirit of the holiday again. This year, I have felt festive and more alive than any Christmas since you died.

You made dozens of ornaments for us, Mom; and every year, they adorn the tree. Crocheted snowflakes; cross-stitched bird feeders, complete with bird and bird food; beaded angels; and cross-stitched mailboxes, eager for Christmas cards from afar.

Even the ornaments on my tree that you didn't make remind me of you: small stuffed animals in whimsical colors, festive Hallmark balls that date each year of my daughters' lives, candy cane decorations handmade by your granddaughters.

You kept the pleasures of life simple, Mom. You took the simple ingredients of crafts and made them sparkle for my tree. Every year I open the box of ornaments, regard them with love, hold them with care, and place them on the tree in remembrance of you and the way you loved Christmas.

I still cherish the early Christmas celebrations on the farm in South Dakota. Remember the plaid dresses that Grandma Weyer made for me to wear? I searched for Santa through Grandma and Grandpa's windows as I heard his sleigh go by, yet being too little to get the same view as my brother. Every year the Weyer cousins performed the Christmas story, wearing capes, holding the baby Jesus and singing Christmas songs.

One year Santa brought me a folding card table and four chairs. That was a marvelous Christmas present! I played on that table and chairs for many hours, serving tea to stuffed animals and an occasional sibling.

The Christmas cookies you made every year smelled so delicious—cut-outs, perfectly baked, and then frosted in red, green, and white. Santa's bells, trees baked to holiday perfection. Sweet date cookies rolled in coconut make my mouth water. Jubilee Jumbles. And thumb print cookies that looked nice but were way too adult for me to enjoy.

Baking sugar cookies is on my list of things to do today, Mom. First, I just wanted to sit, enjoy a cup of coffee on my couch, and look at our tree. It may have been a decade since I've had a Christmas with you, but I know you are here with us, through your ornaments, through your love for my children, and through the customs of Christmas that I took for granted as a child. Thank you for the ornaments and traditions, Mom. They make my Christmas special.

Merry Christmas Mom!

Mom left her heart behind in many ways. Healing was about looking back, finding the good in my mother's life, and celebrating those memories. The Christmas tree in my

living room was the starting point for that because I'd looked at what Mom had made and realized how much she gave me in my 34 years with her. I saw everything anew that Christmas, and found so much good. That was the start of my healing—remembering, and even celebrating, the good.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC

Dear Mom,

Christmas music brings you to my thoughts because I remember when we got the phonograph and our first albums—Nat King Cole, Jim Reeves and Bing Crosby.

For being raised on a farm in the northeastern corner of South Dakota, we enjoyed great diversity in musical tastes. The message and comfort from the familiar songs is meaningful to me even today.

The world keeps changing, Mom. Today's music is very different from what we had, and yet I find myself playing the same music we had on the farm. It's comforting to hear those tunes now with my children. It took me years to find the old Jim Reeves' Christmas album, and I was like a happy little kid when I did. We spent hours listening to it as we decorated the tree, made the cookies, and wrapped the presents.

One of the lines I like best on the Jim Reeves' album is, "...Soon it will be Christmas Day." So much preparation goes into the holiday, and then suddenly, here it is. I am sure you felt the same way, especially with all the baking you did. Tonight I am baking the same date cookies you used to make for us. No one in my household likes them, but I love them. It's my way of keeping your memory alive, Christmas after Christmas.

Mom, soon it will be Christmas Day. Another Christmas without you, but I find you everywhere I turn, so I think you are here after all.

Merry Christmas Mom!