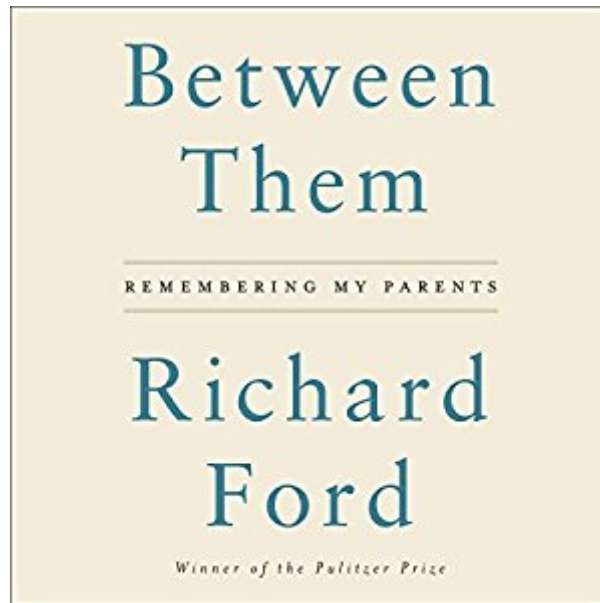




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# Between Them: Remembering My Parents



## Synopsis

From American master Richard Ford, a memoir: his first work of nonfiction, a stirring narrative of memory and parental love. How is it that we come to consider our parents as people with rich and intense lives that include but also exclude us? Richard Ford's parents - Edna, a feisty, pretty Catholic-school girl with a difficult past; and Parker, a sweet-natured, soft-spoken traveling salesman - were rural Arkansans born at the turn of the 20th century. Married in 1928, they lived "alone together" on the road, traveling throughout the South. Eventually they had one child, born late, in 1944. For Ford, the questions of what his parents dreamed of, how they loved each other and loved him become a striking portrait of American life in the midcentury. *Between Them* is his vivid image of where his life began and where his parents' lives found their greatest satisfaction. Bringing his celebrated candor, wit, and intelligence to this most intimate and mysterious of landscapes - our parents' lives - the award-winning storyteller and creator of the iconic Frank Bascombe delivers an unforgettable exploration of memory, intimacy, and love.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Richard Ford is one of America's great writers. He has a way of answering the question "what is the meaning of life?" in the most direct way possible "by writing about living." *Between Them* is two separate memoirs, one of his mother and one of his father, written 30 years apart. In the memoirs, Ford describes the seeming unextraordinary lives of his parents, which at first blush seems to be a self-indulgent exercise but upon further reflection depicts the fairly extraordinary routine of living. Both of Ford's parents were born in Arkansas

to fairly humble beginnings. His father, Parker Ford, was working in a grocery when he met his soon to be wife, Ford's mother, Edna. In 1938, Parker became a salesman for the Faultless Company out of Kansas City, selling laundry starch. The job kept him on the road during the week and home only on the week-ends. Parker held the job until his death. Most of Ford's commentary about his father is conjecture and supposition. The memoir was written almost 50 years after Parker's death and it is clear by Ford's descriptions of his father that a great deal of time had gone by and that Parker was not well known to his son. However, that seems to be part of the point. Ford surmises that his relationship with his father was likely different from other children's relationships to their fathers and observes that "I grew up understanding that the view from outside any family, mine included, and the experience of being inside would always be different."

Parker Ford had his first heart attack at the age of 43. He lived 12 more years, dying at the age of 55. "I can recognize now that life is short and has inadequacies, that once again it requires crucial avoidances as well as fillings in to be acceptable. Most everything but love goes away."

Ford's mother, Edna, was born to a 14 year old who left Edna's father and ultimately married a significantly younger man (who might have been close in age to Edna). Edna's mother sent her to a Catholic boarding school (Edna and her family were not Catholic) out of concern for her being too proximate to the younger husband. For inexplicable reasons, Edna's mother later took her out of school and advised her to tell people they were sisters. Needless to say, Edna did not have the most conventional upbringing and Parker's mother was never exactly accepting of her. Edna ultimately died of cancer while in her 70s. The best part of the book is the Afterword, where Ford explains his view of life, his parents and why he wrote the memoirs. "I have always admired Auden's poem 'La Musee des Beaux Arts' for its acute wisdom that life's most important moments are often barely noticed by others, if noticed at all." This understanding has been a crucial urge for most of what I've written in fifty years. The fact that lives and deaths go unnoticed has specifically inspired this small book about my parents and set its task. Our parents' lives, even those enfolded in obscurity, offer us our first, strong assurance that human events have consequences.

The book is very short and a quick read, with pictures of his parents and his younger self interspersed throughout. The memoirs are consistent with Ford's uncanny ability to see the extraordinary in the ordinary and expose the richness of everyday life. If you enjoy Richard Ford and are curious about where his amazing perspective originated, you should read this book. If you like this post and would like to read more, please visit [FromBriefsToBooks.com](http://FromBriefsToBooks.com).

Richard Ford wrote two memoirs written three decades apart, telling the stories of each of his parents, who have both passed away. The book is *BETWEEN THEM*. The observation of his parents offers a unique perspective, of course he is their son, and as their only child, had a front seat view to their lives, but this is not a typical tell-all of their frailties, their faults and what they could have done better. This is a story about who they were together, perhaps what they could have been, their love for each other despite what their backgrounds did not provide, and how, as a little boy and now a grown man, he understood them each from two different vantage points. He is not criticizing them, he is not pointing fingers for what they *did* to him to make him who he is today. He is simply writing aloud. Wondering, perhaps. What is, or what isn't. The book is a way to capture a time and places, on the road, the two of them together, then baby arrives and how life is. What young Richard surmises life must have been like before he arrived. What he remembers. It is a way to record his parents so that their memories are forever. His childhood as well. There are many interesting events, moments and anecdotes within the book that allow the reader to examine their own parents. For example, when Ford encounters a neighbor who asks him who he is and then refers to his mother as *the cute little black-haired woman*. This reference to his mother as a person other than his own mother made him see her as someone else to the outside world, which stuck with him for a long time. *The more we see our parents fully, after all, see them as the world does, the better our chances to see the world as it is.* I found *BETWEEN THEM* so compelling, so eloquent, so thoughtful. In his acknowledgements, Ford says that his *own belief in lived life's final lack of transcendence always turns me to thoughts of my parents. In difficult moments, long after their deaths, I often experience the purest longing for them for their actuality. So, to write about them, to not turn away, is not only a means to remedy my longing by imagining them near, but it is also to point toward that actuality, which once again is where my understanding of importance begins.* While *BETWEEN THEM* is a story about two ordinary people, it is no ordinary book. 0 Comments

Love and Trouble: A Midlife Reckoning 5/12/2017 0 Comments I had enormous respect for Claire Dederer's prose before I read her new memoir *LOVE AND TROUBLE: A MIDLIFE RECKONING*. Now, I have even more. This book takes us up to mid-life and all that comes before it, including adolescence, college years, marriage and motherhood, with many feelings about sex woven throughout each stage, a whole lot of wit (for you, the reader), big time sizing people up in the most astute way (she could teach a course on this), the ability to eat exotic fruit as a security blanket complete with a hoodie to go along with it, and assigning nicknames to

people that just fit (which is one of my favorite qualities in a person). I could go on but then I would have to share the entire book with you and trust me, you will enjoy reading the book much more than my commentary. However, I would be remiss if I left this part out: Dederer's letters to Roman Polanski are brilliant. It felt cathartic just reading them. If she could please write a similar letter to that man living in the White House, on behalf of all of us, I wouldn't even need to see a draft. Here is what I can tell you. Read this book. Dederer is a voice of a generation. There is no sense comparing her to the female writers who came before her such as Erica Jong or Gloria Steinem, because she has her own unique brand of bold and no holds barred thoughts, which are beautifully displayed in her powerful writing. She not only speaks to women; she tells us things that we didn't even know we wanted to hear. Men can read this book as well. In fact, they should. It will help them to understand us better and in turn, themselves. Here is what I am looking forward to. I hope that she writes a book when she is much, much older, and, of course, I would love many more in between as well, but I am hopeful for a big, juicy book about the golden years.

0 Comments

Round Midnight 5/9/2017 0 Comments

After recently reading Laura McBride's *WE ARE CALLED TO RISE*, (now available in paperback) one of my all-time favorite books, you can imagine that I was elated to know that the author's second novel, *ROUND MIDNIGHT*, was released just last week. *ROUND MIDNIGHT* is a story of four women, each could not be more different than the next, but their lives, without them knowing, come to intersect. McBride takes us back in time, to learn of each woman's history and how they all end up in Las Vegas. A city that holds for many, a place of dazzling lights, gambling, showgirls, entertainers, and where life is on all the time. The Las Vegas for June, Honorata, Engracia, and Coral is much different. It is less of a bright lights, big city. There is a constant hunt for who they are, soul searching, hiding, protecting the past but hoping to change the future, and looking for love, the kind of love that is forever. McBride tells such heartwarming tales but they are not without great sadness. There is a lesson to be learned with every mistake. *ROUND MIDNIGHT* was clearly framed with the same gift that the author created her previous novel with "the talent to draw you in with a hypnotizing narrative, characters who you can't let go of, but eventually you must, so that they can reveal their grief along with a time to rejoice. McBride hints at the possibility of another book in the works. I will be waiting anxiously.

0 Comments

My Life with Bob: Flawed Heroine Keeps Book of Books, Plot Ensues 5/6/2017 0 Comments

Pamela Paul, you are my soul sister. We just haven't met. When I heard that your new book, *MY LIFE WITH BOB: FLAWED HEROINE KEEPS BOOK OF BOOKS, PLOT OF PLOTS*, was coming out, naturally, I was eager to read it, but when I read it in one fell swoop, I was in for an even bigger surprise. Of course, I knew that the book

would be filled with many fabulous books that you've read over the years and authors who have wowed you, and that you were going to share your journal of books, the Book of Bob, otherwise known as Bob, but I had no idea that you were just going to floor me with your insight as a reader. Book lovers, this is better than your favorite book, better than whatever you consider your Bible, even better than your navigation system. Paul, the editor of The New York Times Book Review, takes you on a trip down her very own personal journey from her life in college to present as she catalogs the books she has read and how by simply documenting them in her Book of Books, a journal where she hand writes the title of a book, so that she can look back and see the chronicle of her life, simply by seeing what she has read. She knows where she was when she read which book, if she was traveling from Chiang Mai to Bangkok, breaking up with a boyfriend, giving birth to a baby (and yes, she did stay in the hospital a day longer after giving birth to her third baby, not because she needed the rest but because she wanted to finish THE HUNGER GAMES without being interrupted). Bob has no notes. Just the name of the book is logged. The journal, while detailed in terms of history, it is simple in form. It is more than enough. Clearly. The inner workings of Bob provided the material for MY LIFE WITH BOB. Not only did I learn so much from Paul's book choices and yes, I had to download book after book that I haven't read, while in the middle of reading, but I was elated when I found that we have read many of the same books and garnered the similar thoughts. Again, soul sister. There are so many bookish things that I felt a kindred spirit "no to book clubs, our love of reading about other people's problems, answering the evolving question "why do you read," and one of the best answers I've read: "By putting you in the place of a character unlike yourself in a situation unlike your own a good book forges a connection with the other. You get to know, in some way, someone you never would have otherwise known, to live some other life you yourself will never live." And, Spalding Gray. Paul's first literary crush. I can vividly remember being entranced as Gray performed his monologue in Chicago, which I attended with my mom. I get her crush and awe of his talent. MY LIFE WITH BOB not only reaffirmed my love of reading, but showed me how much more we can get out of books. Magnificent authors, from Franz Kafka to Virginia Woolf, who Paul references, have known this for ages and if you allow them, they will continue to take you places that you can't even imagine. Yet.

0 Comments

Often I Am Happy 5/4/2017

0 Comments

When a tale is told from a unique perspective, as Jens Christian Grøndahl's OFTEN I AM HAPPY is, I find that it is even more interesting to read. The title comes from a poem by B.S. Ingemann, translated to English, which opens the book:

"Often I am happy and yet I want to cry; For no heart fully shares my joy. Often I am

sorrowful, yet have to laugh, That no one my fearful tear shall behold. • This is a story of a woman who is writing to her dead best friend, about her dead husband, to whom her best friend used to be married to, before she had an affair with the narrator's own husband.

Complicated, sort of, but perhaps more common than not. The two couples became friends, then neighbors and our narrator never spoke of what she suspected while her friend or ex-husband were alive. It seems that people just went about their lives and let things be. Now, without a friend, an ex-husband, or a current husband, she has buried two, lost one, she decides to speak to her friend and put things to rest, so to speak. With two stepsons, twins, now grown with children of their own, she removes herself from their lives as well, and goes back to her roots. It is almost soothing to listen to her address this woman who cannot hear her. She is reconciling her past and coming to terms with her future. Regardless of what others around her might think.

Reading *OFTEN I AM HAPPY* is like listening in on a private conversation, one that is not necessarily the saddest because there is a glimmer of hope, and you do not need to feel sorry for her nor do you feel compelled to intervene. She is on it. 0 Comments  
Anything is Possible 5/3/2017 0 Comments • Elizabeth Strout was born to write. Her newest book, *ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE*, is ethereal in its tale of families, set in rural Illinois, who have endured hard times, heartache, and disappointment. Lucy Barton rears her head again, only not from her hospital room, rather as a writer who has achieved success far from home, where she remains. Admired and simultaneously despised by her two siblings. A tale complicated with emotions running high, left over from distraught childhoods and unfulfilled marriages, and rocky parental relationships. Strout has a gentle way of weaving a rich history complete with subtle stings, and you will wonder how each of the suffocated characters find their way out of a bag held so tight for so long. Read with patience. Prepare to re-read sentences, even paragraphs, to keep up with the order and who is who, what has happened. You will be rewarded in the end, not only with a beautiful story, but an understanding of the human spirit. 0 Comments

Killings 5/1/2017 0 Comments One of our greatest writers, Calvin Trillin, has compiled a group of his true crime essays dating back to 1969, originally written for *The New Yorker*, into the book *KILLINGS*. The essays are about victims of untimely deaths, and while each story is about murder, there is nothing scary about this book. It is a fascinating read. Each story packs a certain punch because he wrote them to capture the sense of place and not necessarily to solve the crime. They are insightful, eerie, and the people involved in the murders as well as the towns are what draw you in. Once you finish one story, you are transfixed and on to the next, but don't feel like you are a ghoul, it's Trillin's investigative work that lures. That and his writing. Ok, and the fact that human beings can commit such heinous acts. There were some subjects,

namely the criminals, that left me flabbergasted. People you would never suspect would take another person's life. That is the beauty of how Trillin selects stories of people who have been going about their business for generations, who have not been exposed to gangs, drugs, extreme violence and such, sleepy rural towns where people keep to themselves, farmers whose daily lives have not been modernized other than going from working mules to heavy earth-moving equipment. One character in an essay really amused me, this was Edna Buchanan, a crime reporter for the Miami Herald. She was known for her classic Edna to-the-point, hold nothing back leads. She had the police in Dade County a bit afraid. Often, she knew more about a case than they did. If Shonda Rhimes got a hold of Edna, surely a highly rated TV drama series would be developed around her life and the writers would never be short of story lines. The essay featuring Edna alone is worth the entire book. If you could forget for a minute the subject matter of the book, Trillin deserves his usual praise for well-honed study of his subjects as, rather than attacking their crimes, he fully grabs your attention with such detail, making KILLINGS as much of a treasure, in its own way, as some of his other gems.

0 Comments

Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy

4/30/2017

0 Comments

Given that I highlighted a passage in almost every other chapter in Sheryl Sandberg's OPTION B: FACING ADVERSITY, BUILDING RESILIENCE, AND FINDING JOY, you could say that I felt connected to her and pretty much everything that she had to say. While I haven't lost a spouse and certainly my life was not upended like hers was, I unfortunately know grief, and it has impacted me in ways that I didn't see coming and had a hard time coping with it. There are two major points in the book that Sandberg addressed that I felt especially comforted by. By comfort, I mean validated. But first, I want to say to those who might think that you have to be suffering from the grief of losing a spouse to want to read this book or to gain any insight from it, it's not the case. Not only is this book not exclusive to this particular group or to those grieving or those having grieved in the past for anyone, whether a parent, sibling, or close friend, it is for anyone who has suffered a tragedy such as a trauma, disease, divorce, or other life change that has altered their existence. Together with a friend, who is a psychologist, Adam Grant, who helped Sandberg after her husband died, they co-wrote about feelings that you experience, how to ask for what you need from family and friends, how to resume life as you know it in a new world as life as it is now, along with sharing numerous cases of those who have suffered the loss of a loved one, as well as those who have endured terrible tragedies of other kinds. Sandberg, naturally writes about how challenging it was just to come to terms with the sudden loss of her husband and how she was going to explain the news to her young children. How they were going to get through the funeral, how would she, this strong woman

who wrote about co-parenting and working in this modern world, do the same as a single parent, how she would face her colleagues at work, when was the right time to go back to work. So many unknowns. Her new world was so unfamiliar. The things that struck me were her feelings about how isolated she felt. She has a big extended family, including her husband's. Many friends. Many work friends. Yet, she felt alone. People were scared to talk to her. Or if they asked how she was doing, they didn't want to hear that she was not ok. It was depressing. Asking how are you doing, is not really inquiring about the person on a personal level. You know they are not ok. Try to phrase it to the here and now. How did you get through today? Many people offer to do something but not many just do it. When you lose a loved one, she writes, and this is so true, don't say "What can I do for you?" Just do something. Leave food for the person's family so they don't have to think about cooking, send some beautiful flowers, bring an uplifting book, take their kids out if they are up for it, so that your friend can rest, anything even taking on the most mundane task, just something that shows you care, that they didn't have to ask for. Sandberg talks about a friend of a friend who lost a loved one and a friend showed up every day in the lobby of his building and asked what he didn't want on his burger. He wasn't imposing, wasn't asking to see his friend, just let him know that he was bringing him lunch. In the past, before I experienced grief first-hand, I am sure that I was guilty of asking the too general "how are you?" and "what can I do for you?" without ill intentions, but because I didn't know what to do. Sandberg is well aware that most people do not act to hurt you. As she says, "they're not piling it on," but that is how it feels. I do know that when I did offer simple acts of kindness, it went a long way, and vice versa. I can remember a time when a dear friend's father passed away and friends and family gathered at their house. I asked what her father's favorite dessert was. Blueberry pie. I promptly baked one and brought it over. Her mother told me numerous times over the years how comforting that was to her. The same has been done for me after losing my mother. A friend knew that there was a cookie recipe in my mom's cookbook that was a cookie made with love and she sent home a batch in my son's backpack the week after her funeral. I was so touched and comforted at the same time. I will never forget that gesture of kindness. Another friend, would send me a note every week, just to tell me that she was thinking of me. Having endured much heartache, herself, she knew that once the period of Shiva is over, people don't often check on you. She continued to check on me and this made me feel not only loved but as if she were hugging me. The day after my father died, I received a text from a good friend, who lives in the city where I do, and offered to come to Chicago, where my

father lived. I will never forget how deeply this touched me. To know that a friend would do this for me, without my asking. Just as two of my closest, oldest friends did exactly that, flew across the country to be by my side when my mother passed away, will forever be fixed in my memory and in how I managed the initial shock. This is one way in which we are able to build resilience. Sandberg shares many of her own stories about how she faced adversity, what people have done for her, such as her mother staying at her house for a month, and when she couldn't be there, her sister-in-law took over. How her boss, yes, Jeff Zuckerberg, and his wife, invited her family to spend time with them on vacation so that they could just get away. When it was time to clean out her husband Dave's closet, his own mother came to help her. If you or a friend is in need of a relatable book that can show you that you are not alone, that does not tell you what to do but shows you what others have experienced, and that while some pain never goes away, healing can come. 0 Comments

Authoring an account of one's family life, especially parents, is a delicate proposition fraught with land mines. One incorrect word can be devastating to the author, capable of causing great psychic pain. To be truthful in such an account is probably impossible, and yet for an author to either avoid this necessity or, if famous, letting another perform this task is unacceptable. An author can be fast and loose in fiction writing, but never in memoir. Oddly or not it is my position that P. Roth's, R. Russo's and R. Ford's memoirs of their family life are their finest achievements. Putting yourself and your family under the microscope takes courage, and a great deal of it because of the inevitable pain and suffering it entails. To lie in a memoir serves no purpose because the liar, of course, knows the truth or at least emotionally reacts to it. So, good work Richard to have written what must be written by any feeling and introspective person. As a reader I have always enjoyed most of all the family novel -Buddenbrooks, Look Homeward Angel, to mention two of the finest.

Richard Ford mesmerises with his low key, intimate prose once more. We can picture his ordinary but loving parents in all their normality....beautiful !

An affecting memoir for anyone not so far anymore from the end and thinking about all he doesn't know about the ones who mattered most.

Richard Ford is one of the most interesting and satisfying of contemporary American writers. His recent novel "Canada" had for me a compassionate acknowledgement of human limits, all the while

recognizing how we keep trying to make moral and intellectual sense of our lives. This latest book is a memoir of Ford's parents, and has much of the same sensibility. Highly recommended.

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