



Clarion Review

Humor

A Real Mother: stumbling through motherhood

Denise Malloy

One Red Dog Press

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Five Stars (out of Five)

A Real Mother is a real pleasure. The only thing to wish for in Denise Malloy's collection of hilarious essays is more chapters. Unfortunately, Malloy probably doesn't have the time. Being the mother of two boys, an active blogger, and a columnist for the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* keeps her very busy.

Chapter titles like "Mom, Interrupted" and "Scarred for Life" indicate that Malloy is not offering a cheerfully optimistic parenting manual. She provides no magic prescription for maintaining household discipline. Instead, Malloy shares the barf-in-the-backseat moments that make parenting so wearying that one just has to laugh.

Any parent who has ever spent Christmas Eve attempting to assemble Santa's big surprise before breakfast will recognize Malloy and "The Husband" as they struggle with all of the expectations placed on them as parents of "Older Boy" and "Younger Boy." Her spot-on descriptions of bleary-eyed parents trying to make sense of assembly instructions written in every language except English will have readers nodding and smiling in recognition.

Malloy delivers her tales of domestic woe with good-natured humor that reassures in much the same way that trading kid stories over coffee has comforted mothers for ages. Her self-deprecating tone reminds the reader that Malloy is not a "tiger mother" along the lines of Amy Chua, and her housekeeping is not up to Martha Stewart standards. And yet, her children grow, learn, and reward her with their love and, of course, elbow macaroni trees and glitter-glue handprints.

Readers of Malloy's columns, which have appeared in magazines such as *Family Circle* and *Parents*, may be disappointed to find previously published material included in *A Real Mother*. However, Malloy's stories stand up to rereading, her familiar words eliciting giggles and the need to read portions aloud to unsuspecting spouses.

Realistic details keep Malloy's family tales from becoming overly sentimental, while she does get a little misty about her own aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Still, her snarky sense of humor comes through even in stories featuring old family photographs and the boundless summer vacations of childhood. She muses that her grandparents may indeed have grown up in a gentler, simpler time. But they also spent their later days buying shiny objects on the home-shopping channels. Malloy is the first to admit that no family is perfect.

Sheila M. Trask