

A Special Delivery: Mother-Daughter Letters From Afar

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A daughter in New Zealand and a mother in New England—and a generation's difference in outlook on pregnancy and marriage—are only part of the appeal of this book of letters written by mother Joyce and daughter Elizabeth during Elizabeth's pregnancy in her home so far away.

Joyce, a writer and motivator of young adults for college and career, and Elizabeth, an artist and free spirit, explore the issues that separate their generations and find both common ground and room for difference as Elizabeth writes home to tell her mother of a coming grandchild. The two discuss, in candid and less-than-perfect letters, the subjects of marriage (Elizabeth doesn't believe in it, Joyce is for it, citing the issues of child care and citizenship); care during pregnancy and delivery (Elizabeth favors a midwife and home birth, Joyce yearns for her daughter to have a doctor and a hospital because of her own difficult deliveries); and culture (the baby's father is Polynesian and rooted in a different kind of life from the world Joyce is most familiar with). There is discussion and dissent, but less perhaps than one might expect with such drastic differences; mother and daughter profess much love and respect for one another, and while some tension definitely comes through in the letters, the end result is harmony.

Letters are a very personal form of writing, and there are a few references to things unexplained and incomprehensible to the reader—but not enough to impair the book's value. The tone is definitely conversational and individual, with multiple exclamation points, handwritten signatures and revealing insights into the personalities of the two women. Subject matter covers everything from going through pregnancy on a vegetarian diet to cravings for Oreos; choices in designer baby clothes that will be tie-dyed later; money issues and the difficulty of keeping an old car running. There are also fascinating glimpses into the rural life of an artist in the "wilds" of New Zealand—enough to whet the appetite for more information.

Mothers and daughters should find this a fascinating glimpse into the relationship between two women with very different approaches to life—approaches that nonetheless do not get in the way of the bond they share.

MARLENE SATTER (November / December 1999)

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