

Finding Maria

Peter Szabo

Chickadee Prince Books (May 1, 2017)

Softcover (140pp)

978-0-9913274-4-7

Finding Maria is a heartfelt, honest look at love and loss across generations of a family.

In *Finding Maria*, Peter Szabo tells a personal, yet relatable, story about the passing of his grandmother. It is a narrative of discovery of self and family, of coming to terms and making peace, of the web of emotion that inextricably links families, and of how pain and loss tug at those connections.

The book begins with Szabo going to help his father and aunt clean out the apartment of his grandmother, who had moved to a nursing home. His reminiscence continues, flashing back frequently to Szabo's rekindled relationship with his grandmother during his adult years. The narrative ends with family members fighting over, and ultimately dividing, her ashes.

Alongside Szabo, the audience moves past a stereotypical image of a classic grandmother (looking at flowers and going to the opera) as he slowly uncovered more about who she truly was, even as she slipped away. His revelations come through his conversations with her, the memories his father and aunt share, and the items found in her apartment (letters, photos, notes from classes she took). The result is a fuller appreciation for the woman herself and for her grandson's journey.

This book will appeal to adults who've discovered their grandparents' lives and faced their grandparents' deaths. These people will relate to Szabo's openness and honesty (including his dread of spending time with his grandmother when they first reconnected). Many people can also relate to the mixed feelings and tricky relationships within families as people grow and age and to the complexity and reward of intergenerational relationships. In some ways Szabo's story is commonplace, but that's part of its beauty. He brings voice to so many who wrestle through the complexity of what it means to love your family—with all the conflict and contradictions that come along with that.

Szabo's narrative is well paced and alternates smoothly between time periods to craft a full, seamless story. He uses clear, simple dialogue to give the characters voice and move the story forward. There are occasional tough-to-read sentences, but there are just as many, if not more, that are achingly beautiful: "Months after she was moved to the rehabilitation center, months of silent suffering, months in which lucidity vanished, months alone, too many months, she died."

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MELISSA WUSKE (November 23, 2016)

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