

If Mom's Not Dead by 9, I'm Leaving: A Journal About Living, Loving, Dying

Charlene Roycht

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As difficult as it is to go through the process of losing a loved one, it can be comforting to realize that others are on a similar path. This moving tribute, a year-long recounting of one family's ups and downs, tells the unfolding saga of the decline of the author's mother and the diarist's own spiritual journey.

Moved from her home in Sun City, Arizona after one too many falls, eighty-four-year-old Katherine Roycht, mother of two daughters, comes to live in an assisted care facility in Toledo, Ohio where daughter Donna lives, and just five hours from Charlene. Katherine's health problems mount, and she is in and out of the hospital over the course of the year. "mom's a roller coaster, some days bad...some days good functions. every day a new adventure."

The author is a poet, performer, and life coach; her own back story comes through in the pages as well, her issues as a cancer survivor, the relationship with her partner in Toronto who undergoes hip surgery, her shaky finances and irregular work schedule working on film crews in Toronto, her commitment to being with her mom, and her spiritual path, peopled by the likes of Marianne Williamson and Amma, the living saint from Kerela, India.

Readers see a largely positive picture of the individuals who give care to Katherine, though without the typical woes of mountains of hospital bills or dealing with insurance. Roycht's mother seems to have had sufficient funds to pay for her care, and practical Donna shoulders the paperwork responsibility, so few details emerge. As painful as this process is, the same experience would be nearly impossible for those without such resources.

Interspersed throughout are prayers addressed to god, angels, her mother, Williamson, and Amma, as well as nuggets of advice or admonitions directed to the reader: "take the time to read and find your path. it's our purpose to do that. then live it."

As the year wears on, the stress takes its toll, as the sisters learn that people can linger on. Notes the author late in the game, "i don't get it. we've had closure, we've had instructions, we've had suggestions, made funeral plans, tears, lots of prayers. the whole bit. she's at peace. we're at peace. we're all just waiting for death. this sucks."

The author's enthusiasms are pervasive, some might even say self-indulgent. Teasing out the larger issues from a constant cry of prayer can challenge readers to stay with her. Although it's a different kind of "conversation with god," it is well worth consideration, especially as more people are coping with ailing loved ones.

BOBBYE MIDDENDORF (November / December 2004)

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