

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

If There's a Mailbox in Heaven

Celeste N. Bowers

Outskirts Press (Feb 23, 2012)

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A bit more than halfway through Celeste Bowers' memoir celebrating her daughter's life, she notes that even several years after young Christina's death, "People still ask me, 'How do you do it? How do you keep your faith after witnessing the pain and suffering of your child?'" At that point in the book, the reader already knows the answer.

There are few things more frightening for any parent to imagine than the loss of a child. With *If There's A Mailbox In Heaven*, Bowers shares her family's journey through an inconceivably tragic time, and her personal tribute to her young daughter illustrates how strongly they relied on their faith and trust in God to see them through.

Bowers shares both the significant and everyday moments of Christina's life, and readers will learn of her helpful and empathetic spirit, her love of softball, and her devotion to her family and friends. Bowers expresses that Christina's desire to know God was present from a very early age and served as the overriding theme of her short life. This strong faith helped Christina to accept her diagnosis and its outcome from the start, and she encouraged those around her to face it as courageously as she did.

The black and white photos sprinkled throughout the book help to personalize Christina's story, and her evident happiness in the pictures shines through. Bowers also includes some of her own poetry; some written prior to and some following Christina's death. There are a few minor punctuation and typographical errors, but they do not disrupt the flow.

The well-structured book includes six chapters, or "packages," as Bowers refers to them, each representing a parcel of love and memories she wants to send to her daughter in Heaven. The first five are written by Bowers, recounting happy memories interspersed with the challenging times in the hospital, illustrating all of the ways in which Christina's life and her passing touched others and continues to do so. The last chapter consists of numerous letters from those very people she touched, some who knew her and some who learned her story after her death and were moved to write.

Bowers' tone is heavily religious throughout the book, emphasizing the role that belief played in their family's ability to endure such a traumatic experience. Rather than the fear and sadness associated with such tragedy, Bowers chooses instead to focus on Christina's inspiring courage and faith through it all. Memorializing Christina's encouraging words, Bowers created T-shirts and awards with the inscription, "It's not about me. It's about Christ working through me."

Christina's story proves a moving and inspiring testament to a courage that had its roots in religion and continues branching out. Readers are certain to be touched by her mother's tribute.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (May 29, 2012)

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