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If You Ever Need Me, I Won't Be Far Away

Bruce Farrell Rosen
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Bruce Rosen is a financial advisor, writer, husband, father, and son. His mother, Alma (meaning “soul” in Spanish), played a significant role in his life, and her continuing power and presence is expressed in the title of this memoir. As Rosen says early in his lengthy first book, “There is an ebullience, a joy, an overflowing fountain of compassion that my mom brought to this world, and it touched so many souls.”

Alma was just a child when neighbors perceived that she had the “second sight.” For most of her adult life, she made her income by doing tea-leaf readings. According to her son, she once had clients among the Hollywood stars, including Marlon Brando. Rosen cites many instances of how his mother’s psychic abilities affected his own life. Perhaps most importantly, she told her son he would marry someone named Sue, a girl who would “find him” so that he didn’t need to search for the right one. The fated yet sometimes rocky relationship between Rosen and his wife Sue is described in detail in the book.

In contrast to his mother, Rosen’s father was not a sensitive person. His unfaithfulness to his wife and brutality toward his son marred Rosen’s youth, and ultimately led to his parents’ divorce. The author grew into a man with a toughness built into his psyche from defending himself from his father, as well as tenderness inculcated by his protective mother. This duality made him sharp-sighted and successful in business, but gentle and caring toward his own two sons and the women in his life. These qualities are highlighted throughout *If You Ever Need Me, I Won’t Be Far Away*.

Rosen has been writing for many years, occasionally contributing articles to two San Francisco newspapers. In this book are many examples of his ability as an evocative wordsmith, especially in his analysis of and connection to the music of his generation.

If You Ever Need Me, I Won’t Be Far Away is more than six hundred pages long. The stories of Rosen’s extended family and their connections to his remarkable mother are intriguing, but he has burdened these recollections with lengthy vignettes and rants about sports, politics, and finance. These interests of the author belong in another book, not in a sensitive family portrait; the extraneous passages give the book a jerky feel, leaving it with no coherent chronology. One obvious example follows the poignant description of Alma’s death and funeral in 1999, very near the end of the book and arguably its logical conclusion. Suddenly and inexplicably, readers are fast-forwarded to the political events of 2008—the bailout of the financial industry and the election of Barack Obama. This abrupt shift is given no emotional context, and seems to have no demonstrable impact on Rosen’s relationship with his mother or family.

With continued editing, *If You Ever Need Me, I Won’t Be Far Away* could be a lean book that fulfills the promise implied in Rosen’s title: a portrait of a loving matriarch with special gifts who lives on in the spiritual influence felt by her children and grandchildren.

BARBARA BAMBERGER SCOTT (September 13, 2011)

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