



Prepare for Departure: Notes on a Single Mother, a Misfit Son, Inevitable Mortality and the Enduring Allure of Frequent Flyer Miles

Mark Chesnut

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With pathos and aplomb, travel writer Mark Chesnut's enchanting book *Prepare for Departure* gathers essays about his aging mother and growing up in the 1970s as part of a single-parent household.

Chesnut's road trips and flights are captured in pithy terms, interspersed with lists featuring jaunty life advice. There's a thread about being gay and coming out to his mother, Eunice, too. She's the book's center—a constant, loving presence who moved into a nursing home in her late eighties because of a brain tumor. In the book, that event prompts recollections about how she raised Chesnut after his father's death. So begins an affectionate exploration of being a daydreaming son in western New York, who also summered in Kentucky among his Southern Baptist relatives.

Moving between Chesnut's perspectives in his youth, when he relished eccentricity, and his more tempered adult views of the world, especially while dealing with institutionalized elder care, the book chooses tenderness as its medium. Eunice, in her different stages of life, is enthralling: she's practical, Southern (she avoids confrontations with a smile), and unfazed by her son's antics.

Chesnut's childhood and adolescence are captured via entertaining episodes—as of making up airlines with unusual enthusiasm for advertising ephemera, role-playing Endora from the sitcom *Bewitched*, and evading the miseries of gym class. In the course of each, Eunice's wise support allows her son to indulge in his quirkiness. Later, as their roles reverse, Chesnut's concern for Eunice manifests in ranging ways: he befriends the nursing home's staff, in hopes that they'd extend that same care toward Eunice; he preserves her dignity as her memory wanes. Such subtleties are aching, eloquent tributes to their relationship.

Warm and elegiac, the memoir *Prepare for Departure* voices a son's love for his inimitable mother.

KAREN RIGBY (July / August 2022)

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