



Remembering You: Until God Whispers My Name

Marilyn R. Duncan

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Marilyn R. Duncan's poignant memoir celebrates her mother's life, kindness, and fortitude, painting her as a woman who impacted many others.

Marilyn R. Duncan's heartfelt memoir about losing her mother, *Remembering You*, details the process of grief after the death of a loved one.

Jeannette was Duncan's mother, best friend, and confidante. She was diagnosed with dementia in 2004; stressful days followed, with Duncan and her sister taking up caregiving roles, assuming Jeannette's responsibilities, and becoming her representatives when she could not speak. Their perseverance and diligence were tested throughout the experience. When Jeannette died in 2016, she left behind a legacy of love and courage.

The work is divided into three sections. The first focuses on Jeannette's life after her diagnosis and her final days. The second encompasses cherished memories, including of snuggling together during winter months, pretending to camp while Jeannette read stories aloud. The third section is a practical guide with information on preparing for loss, including making adequate funeral arrangements. There is disconnect in this arrangement: the shift from focus on Jeannette to general information in a self-help vein feels like the work of two separate books.

Early family memories prove to be a strong foundation for the account of Jeannette's last years. The death of Duncan's father in years previous becomes a means of examining the changes within a family before and after diagnosis and death, even ahead of Jeannette's passing. Interactions with health care workers are honest reflections of what can be expected while someone is dying, with examples of which reactions are most helpful.

Though the book is keen as it follows Jeannette's final moments, its supporting characters play vague roles. Duncan's brother only appears in brief; he reappears towards the end. Duncan's sister played a large role in Jeannette's care, but is a passive character in the memoir.

The book's language reflects sadness surrounding Jeannette's death. Duncan describes grief as unexpected and uncontrollable, likening it to a chameleon changing colors and to a ghost creeping out from the inside. It is genuine in asserting that there is no one simple response to grief, and is uplifting as it encourages engaging the happy memories of those who have departed. Included medical information, including that women are more likely to develop dementia than men, emphasizes key points learned from Jeannette's experiences that apply to others as well.

Helpful sources are cited at the foots of pages. Duncan's poems and Jeannette's oil paintings are also included; they make the narration less monotonous and are engaging and deep, though Jeannette's landscapes are reproduced in black-and-white. Duncan's poems are another avenue into her devotion and love for her mother, and are more moving than the prose.

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EDITH WAIRIMU (September 25, 2019)

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