

Surrender: A Memoir of Nature, Nurture, and Love

Marylee MacDonald

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Surrender is a gripping and defiant memoir about personal identity and motherhood.

In her captivating memoir *Surrender*, Marylee MacDonald reflects on her life as an adoptee and how it influenced the relinquishment of her firstborn son.

In this intricate tale, MacDonald discusses preserving her marriage, finding her son, discovering her birth parents, meeting the love of her life, making a child, and becoming herself. The book begins at the end, with MacDonald in Phoenix and explaining to her second husband, Bruce, why moving to the same city where she gave up her first son for adoption at the age of sixteen is traumatic. She speaks of consoling the crying child and angry adolescent inside of her soul. This intimacy leads into a process of finding her son, a years-long challenge that culminates when he is reunited with his mother and four biological siblings.

The narrative is flawless in its transfers between time periods. It features a dancing tone and wise rhetoric, following MacDonald's 1940s adoption by a school teacher and a longshoreman. Due to her father's drunkenness and abuse, her mother ruffled social feathers and filed for a divorce. Out of a sense of obligation, MacDonald followed all of the rules, sewed her own clothes, completed all of her chores, and carried high marks in school. Then she met a boy, and atoms collided.

The book's tone becomes hushed as MacDonald discusses sex and how it led to a teenage pregnancy, followed by an inevitable-seeming adoption because of dominant, prudish social norms. Heartache pumps through the text, evident in moments such as a memory of playing Brahms's Concerto #2 for consolation. This and other bright details are resonant, capturing the voice of adolescence well.

MacDonald makes a harrowing cognitive journey, and references to experts on adoption, psychology, and juvenile development are interlaced in her extensive anthropological digging. No skeleton is left in the closet in this candid tale, which winds toward scenes in which MacDonald, her unborn child, and her ailing mother move to Phoenix "for their health," though in reality MacDonald spent her last trimester in a home for unwed mothers. The period proved transformative to her coming of age.

Proud and introspective, the book never stops questioning what it means to heal. Its pages are an exploration of trauma, concluding that accepting the past strengthens future possibilities. This makes *Surrender* a gripping and defiant memoir about personal identity and motherhood.

SAMANTHA ANN EHLE (October 1, 2020)

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