

★ **The Art of Misdiagnosis: Surviving My Mother's Suicide****Gayle Brandeis**

Beacon Press (Nov 14, 2017)

Hardcover \$26.95 (240pp)

978-0-8070-4486-5

*Exemplifying the best of the memoir genre, Brandeis tells a story that is both intimately specific and intensely relatable.*

In *The Art of Misdiagnosis*, Gayle Brandeis strives to make meaning from the mysteries of death, illness, and family.

Brandeis's mother committed suicide one week after Brandeis had a baby. Those deeply contrasting experiences set the scene for the opening of this memoir: a daughter going through her mother's things, trying to make sense of her death.

From the singularity of moments like birth and death, and the focused desire to understand, Brandeis's narrative spirals outward as she circles wider and wider to make sense of her mother's life, her family, and the way both women approach physical and mental illness.

From page one, the narrative pulls no punches: "After my mom hangs herself, I become Nancy Drew." The pace modulates between fast and contemplative, but is always pulled forward decisively by Brandeis's compulsive, contagious need to know her mother and herself.

The Nancy Drew comparison is apt; the memoir has the intrigue and suspense of a mystery novel, and Brandeis, while shrewd and mature, echoes the innocence and earnestness of a child detective. Brandeis generously shares deep self-reflection, openly and unselfconsciously, without wallowing or seeking pity. Her story is chilling and poignant, and not one dash sentimental.

Exemplifying the best of the memoir genre, Brandeis tells a story that is both intimately specific, even peculiar at times, and yet is intensely relatable. The story will connect best with adult daughters who are struggling to make meaning of their relationships with the mothers, and in the process trace the threads of cause and effect that influenced their own paths to and through adulthood.

Composed of dated reminiscences, journal-like letters to her mother, excerpts of the documentary her mother was working on at the time of her death, and more, the narrative is textured but cohesive. Each piece is aptly chosen and crafted beautifully into the whole by Brandeis's skill as a writer and poet.

*The Art of Misdiagnosis* is a memoir that plumbs the depths of life in order to find unvarnished, deep grace.

MELISSA WUSKE (November/December 2017)

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