

## Unlocking: A Memoir of Family and Art

**Nancy L. Pressly**

She Writes Press (May 5, 2020)

Softcover \$16.95 (206pp)

978-1-63152-862-0

*The memoir Unlocking is keen in addressing how images can reveal hidden secrets and bring forth truth, understanding, and compassion.*

Nancy L. Pressly's sensitive memoir, *Unlocking*, concerns the power of images to release memories, tell stories, and inspire future generations.

Recovering from pancreas-related cancer surgery with hope of a cure at only fifty percent, Pressly became aware of her own mortality. Then, while putting her house in order, she discovered a trove of haunting images from her family's past, a reminder of how ephemeral memories can be. These led her toward healing, self-discovery, reconciliation, and preservation.

A first-generation American, Pressly was astonished to realize how little she knew about her family's early twentieth century, Eastern European Jewish life. It involved flights from persecution and pogroms and the pain of leaving everything behind. On a more personal level, the narrative reveals how the images broke down the "self-protective amnesia" surrounding Pressly's troubled relationship with her father: she "began to unlock emotions walled up for a very long time, which even years of therapy had never fully resolved." Her father's decision to forbid her from pursuing her first love is a dark thread throughout; it blighted their relationship and held her emotions captive.

Love and loss play out as Pressly navigates her inner and outer worlds, revealing both strength and vulnerability. Lively descriptions bring the creativity and excitement of the 1960s New York art scene forth. Pressly is seen mingling with rising art world stars, founding her own successful consulting firm, and consulting established art institutions and museums, affirming the values she learned at her parents' dining room table. The book's beautiful color photographs, both of Pressly's family and of works of art, are a meaningful addition.

The book also details Pressly's rise to success and her struggles to reconcile the needs of her blossoming career with her desires to nest, a conflict made more intense because of the social roles that people were expected to perform in the workplace and at home. She learned that trying to do, and be, everything was an impossible goal. Still, she and her husband, bolstered by their mutual love, faced life-threatening health challenges, financial stress, and career uncertainties with courage and resilience. The book's satisfying conclusion finds the couple on the cusp of new adventures.

Expressing enthusiasm for family, art, and travel, *Unlocking* is a memoir that's keen in addressing how images can reveal hidden secrets and bring forth truth, understanding, and compassion.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July 4, 2020)

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