

Welcome to My Garden: A Father's Gift of Reflections, Life Lessons, and Advice

Brian Murray

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Welcome to My Garden is a poignant scrapbook of life reflections and guidance for the next generation.

Brian Murray's musing book *Welcome to My Garden* compiles a father's advice to his children.

A paean to parenthood, the book waxes philosophical about the privilege, purpose, responsibility, and stress of raising children. It asserts that time with one's children is as beautiful and fulfilling as it is fleeting and "painful, confusing, and overwhelming." For posterity, Murray writes letters to his children on subjects including gratitude, empathy, and mindfulness, drawing on his experiences as an entrepreneur, corporate professional, college professor, and author.

Each chapter is prefaced by incisive quotes, as with Marya Hornbacher's observation that people are emotional pack rats: "All of us carry around countless bags of dusty old knickknacks dated from childhood." And guided by the framing conceit of the garden as a metaphor for life, the chapters often run long, winding through their ruminations and insights, which range from prosaic to profound. New parents, one chapter says, are often still children themselves in many ways, trying to figure out situations in the moment while maintaining a facade of competence.

On personal topics, the book is candid, recounting mistakes and failures and suggesting that both can be teaching moments, as when Murray discusses reaching a breaking point or being hounded by nagging self-doubt. Ultimately, though, these personal touches limit the text's general reach. They're rich ground for the target audience, though, with their intimate memories about experiences like running a marathon, hiking, and the fear experienced during an elementary school shooting.

Warm and uplifting in tone, the book serves as a broad family guide to personal growth. It extols virtues including positivity, aligning one's mindset with one's goals, and self-compassion. Its helpings of encouragement and positive reinforcement are generous. Its language often trends figurative: embers of self-doubt are stoked; a mind is "awhirl with negative thoughts." Descriptive flourishes also mark the book's progression, as with a memory of wind whipping heavy snow around and dimming the streetlamps' glow: "The roaring wind and snow swallowed up most sounds, but they couldn't fully stifle the angry growl of the thirty-inch snowblower I was maneuvering—its 400cc engine was running at full throttle, and I held on tightly as the machine wildly bucked around." Further, the book's closing thoughts and wishes are quite stock, featuring generalized advice about being oneself, blazing one's own trail, and not worrying what others think.

A poignant scrapbook of family advice, *Welcome to My Garden* is filled with a father's lessons for his children—an enduring gift of hard-earned wisdom.

JOSEPH S. PETE (February 29, 2024)

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