



Not the Mother I Remember: A Memoir

Amber Lea Starfire

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When Amber discovers cardboard boxes containing a lifetime of her mother's journals and letters, she realizes she's been given a rare chance to unlock the enigma that had been her mother—but will her mother's writings reveal the woman she remembers, or someone else altogether? Not the Mother I Remember tells the story of a sensitive girl raised by an exceptional and unconventional woman during a time of social change, gradually exposing the true nature of their relationship and their extraordinary bonds.

Not the Mother I Remember: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Not the Mother I Remember: A Memoir for online ebook

Michele Gardiner says

Fascinating and a bit heavy. I found the family dynamics interesting and really enjoyed the various adventures weaved through out. The heavy parts: all the family turmoil and struggles.

I've long realized even when individuals live in the same home and share experiences-rarely will two people's perspectives be a like. The last funeral I attended, the deceased woman's six children confirmed my belief-as each got up to share their memories of their mother. If I didn't know better, I'd have thought they were each talking about a different woman. The contrast was almost hilarious.

I appreciate how the author of "Not the Mother I remember" was inquisitive enough to delve into her mother's written thoughts, and for being open and honest enough to share.

The pages captivated me enough I read this in two days.

Deborah Wong says

There are two voices in this memoir - the author's and her mother (Jackie Carr)'s. Amber Lea Starfire offers an introduction to prepare the reader for the way in which the story is presented, which makes it easier to follow. Jackie Carr's voice is found mainly in her journal entries and correspondence, which were found when Amber was cleaning out her mother's home.

This reader truly felt for the child whose mother was always occupied, a seemingly neglected child who almost appeared to be an afterthought to her mother. I felt angry on Amber's behalf when her mother casually informs her daughter of her true parentage, and numerous other incidents which were either thoughtless, cruel, or inappropriate.

Thinking that the mother's journals might hold the "other side of the story" offering some plausible explanation for her daughter's childhood memories, I found that although Jackie was often brilliant and ahead of her time in many respects, she appeared to be unaware of the effect that her decisions and behavior had on her children. One reckless incident in particular involved her taking two of her children on a world tour, often piloting her own small aircraft. As the daughter of a pilot who also put his children through dangerous flights, that part of the story hit a nerve with me (my father later died in a private plane crash - luckily, no one else was aboard).

In any event, it was only after receiving her Alzheimer's diagnosis in her later years did Jackie Carr reflect upon her regrets as far as her children were concerned. Prior to that, she admitted that she never believed in having regrets, or saying "sorry". She did try to cover financially for her six children, which unfortunately couldn't completely make up for the lack of stable and loving parenting.

Eventually one finds that along with the author's goal to resolve the resentment and hurt from her childhood, she learns to forgive her mother, as well as learning more about herself along the way.

Julianna Mauga says

Wonderful book

A relatable book with an honest look at the relationship between a mother and daughter. I loved how the author's view of her mother evolved while reading her journals. Very touching, I highly recommend.

Linda says

Amber finds her mother's journal writings after she died and discovering what went on in the mind of the woman who could fill her with an oozing "tar" of hatred. Her mother was a product of her own childhood issues as well as a woman of the 60s. Since my own mother was quite conservative, I was astonished—horrified—to read some of the things Amber's mother did. This is not a mommy-dearest kind of book, though. Amber loves her mother and tries to understand her, wants to forgive her and find peace. We follow Amber's journey of remembering, of discovering this other woman through the pages of her journal, of the tar transforming.

Amber is thoughtful and gracious, managing to be respectful of her dysfunctional family while exposing the worst and letting us feel her emotions. I never felt like a voyeur of their dirty laundry – of which there is plenty. There is no tidy, happy ending, but Amber wraps up with a satisfying realism that anyone with a difficult mother can relate to. I found the story gripping, well-written and amazingly objective, a fascinating drama of a complex woman and the daughter who hoped for understanding and peace.

Carol Roberts says

This book left me shattered at the sad story of a child's desperate need for love and acceptance and a mother's failure. It's a fascinating read—most definitely creative nonfiction at its best.

Lori says

I was a goodreads first reads winner of the book "Not The Mother I remember:A Memoir" this is an honest recollection of a Daughter's life with her mother. This is Amber's memoir growing up with a rather eccentric mom. After her mother died, Amber whose born name was Linda came across journals her mother wrote for decades. the mother she thought she knew all these years surprised her with the thoughts she wrote down in her journals. I found the part where her mom Jackie took her two youngest kids at eight and ten and traveled the world with them.wow what a year! A year after that her mother got her pilots license and took Linda to every state in the USA.

I think there are a lot of us who can relate to the "mother- daughter relationship. I know my own could be intense, good, and even frustrating at times. a nice read from a woman who "got to know" her mom a bit better after reading her journals.

Cynthia R Vincent says

Parenting

I often wonder what my children think of my life. Will their opinion change when I'm gone and they read my travel journals and Majorie's?

Laura says

I don't usually want to read a memoir of a person I do not know who is not famous in some way. Outstanding artists, musicians, military heroes, and Presidents have been more of a draw for me.

Fortunately, I took a chance and read this author's memoir. It was a fascinating and well-written read. The story pulled me in rapidly and enticed me on with yet another adventure. I actually was sad when the book ended. Having reviewed a few memoirs recently, this one is my favorite. I expect it will stay in my memory for a long time.

When we are children we have certain memories of events. These memories may be very different from the experience of others. We see who our parents are through our individual filters.

The author had a good deal of resentment and even hatred, at times, toward her mother, Jacquelyn B. Carr. Her mother was unconventional, a wild "free spirit" who in her striving for freedom sometimes brought her children into dangerous situations and was even guilty of neglect at times. When her mother died, Amber had the opportunity to read the numerous journals and letters she wrote about her life. Often the family events that the author remembered were not even recorded by her mother. Jacquelyn chose other events to record.

After sifting through reams of paper recordings, the author came to know and admire her mother in new ways, although a little resentment still lingered. Jacquelyn's strength and her support of her children may have lacked something that Amber and her siblings needed, but she did what she thought was right at the time. Jacquelyn saw the world through different eyes than her daughter.

Most of us have issues with our parents. My childhood experiences run parallel to the author's in some respects. When my parents died, I had to come to terms with my resentments mixed with my love for them. This memoir had special meaning for me. As the author has done, I resolved most of my issues, but it took years.

I received a free digital copy of this memoir in exchange for an honest review.

Anthony Stancomb says

A brilliant book, it hurtles the reader through many decades of shambolic but exciting lives and lays bare the problems of a family living in the thrall of a mother who dominates their lives

It's moving and powerful as, the author takes us through her own turbulent life as well as her mother's, and with great skill, she looks at events that have happened around her with a sharp and sensitive eye, and you experience the characters and events as if the author is sitting in a chair beside you. The descriptions of the frictions and tensions between her mother and her children were fascinating, and the excitement as she bounced from one situation and man to the next was startling.

It's not often I just can't put a book down, but this one I read in a day. The pace never flags, and the writing is superb. Nothing is dwelt on for too long, and the characters jump up at you from the page.

Actually, I don't think the side of her mother she uncovers when she reads the diaries was much different to the one she had already experienced. She does discover a more reflective and understanding side to her mother, but in all, she was true to form throughout. Ten children so frequently don't realise the depth of their parent's feeling towards them – as I know well.

What is truly inspirational about the book is that the lives and tribulations of two equally strong, determined, but misguided women are laid bare, and despite the emotional angst, the wrong decisions and the failures, both of them seem to come out on top.

It may be a story about the usual tensions, dramas and internal politics of a typically middle class American family, but it's quite a harrowing tale, and even though it's not a long book, it's an epic that stretches over four generations and it leaves you feeling drained and euphoric. At the end of it you feel you just finished watching a Shakespearean tragedy – or as Milton put it: 'Calm of mind, all passion spent'.

Well worth the read.

Cathryn Wellner says

After a lifetime in the shadow of a strong-willed, non-conformist mother with a yen for adventure, Starfire discovered her mother's letters. They cracked her open in fascinating but discomfiting ways. The woman she discovered was even more complicated than the mother she grew up with. Weaving her own memories with her mother's revelations make this a uniquely compelling memoir. I was drawn into it and finished it quickly.

I had the sense Amber still has some unfinished business coming to a sense of peace with her mother. But that is the lot of most of our lives. Blood is a strong connector, but it does not promise an easy acceptance of those who unsettle us, especially when they should be our strongest allies. When it comes to challenging parents, the unsettling runs deep and does not end with their death. Starfire does a masterful job with trying to sort through a lifetime of light and shadow and with revelations that came after dementia and death ended any possibility of opening difficult conversations.

Kathleen Pooler says

Mother –daughter relationships are complex under the best of circumstances. In her stunning memoir, *Not the Mother I Remember*, Amber Lea Starfire details the complexities of her own relationship with her mother through her dead mother's journals and letters. What she discovers is both heartbreaking and transformative as she slowly unveils the meaning of her mother's words and reflects on the perception of the mother she thought she knew. With raw honesty and vivid prose, she conveys the heartache and confusion of a child who craves her mother's attention. As a reader, I felt her childhood anguish yet I was also mesmerized by her mother's spirit of adventure and independence. What mother earns a pilot's license and flies her two children all over the country, making sure to land in each state? As in life, the characters are multidimensional, each

with their flaws and redeeming features. Starfire portrays her characters realistically and makes them believable. I could admire her mother's spunk while also wishing she could have been more present to her children.

What resulted from these painful revelations about her mother is a deeper understanding of a woman trying to find her place. It is through facing the pain of the past that Starfire is able to reach a level of acceptance and forgiveness toward her mother and in doing so, she sets herself free.

This is a beautifully written, powerful memoir about one woman's heroic journey into the past to find freedom for herself.

Story Circle Book Reviews says

"Try to see it my way
Only time will tell if I am right or I am wrong."
—John Lennon & Paul McCartney

While the Beatles may have been singing about romantic relationships in their 1965 hit, "We Can Work It Out," the lyrics could easily be about the generation gap that became so apparent in that tumultuous decade. Expectations were shifting, especially for women, and Amber Lea Starfire's detailed memoir poignantly captures this moment in time through the parallel perspectives of her own childhood stories and her mother's meticulous—and startling—personal journals.

In a scene reminiscent of Terry Tempest Williams' recent memoir, *When We Were Birds*, Starfire discovers boxes of journals while cleaning the apartment her mother, Jackie, must leave because her Alzheimer's disease is too advanced for her to live alone. While Williams' journey grows from the enigmatically empty pages she finds on her mother's shelf, Starfire is faced with volume upon volume of detailed writings that cover year after year of adventures, flirtations, affairs, and most of all, longings. This is not the fragile woman Starfire felt she had to protect as a child, but a woman struggling to blossom beyond the expectations of her role as wife and mother.

Starfire alternates between her own childhood stories and excerpts from her mother's writings. Both voices are strong, and though they share the same experiences—an ambitious "world tour" in 1962 and cross-country flights with Jackie as a new pilot—mother and daughter come away with very different lessons. Jackie is spreading her wings, while young Linda (Starfire's given name) often feels neglected. Starfire's gift as a writer is that she shows both perspectives, and while her hurt is palpable, she doesn't condemn her mother's actions, but instead seeks to understand them.

One particularly poignant scene chronicles a visit to Planned Parenthood for birth control. It's a powerful moment, personally and politically. While Jackie is acknowledging the teenage Linda's maturity and independence in a way many mothers of the time would have been unable to do, she's so ashamed of the whole affair that she waits outside the clinic, as though this is a crime and she's the driver of the getaway car. Scenes like this capture the conflicted messages Jackie was giving, and Linda receiving, as they both tried to figure out their roles in the world.

While they never completely "worked it out"—Starfire didn't read her mother's journals until after her death—this mother-daughter memoir brings the two closer together than ever. Anyone who grew up in the 1960s will appreciate Starfire's unflinchingly honest look at a confusing, if ultimately liberating, era for women.

by Sheila Trask
for Story Circle Book Reviews
reviewing books by, for, and about women

CV Weldon says

I could not put the book down. Although I read this book since over a year now, I can still recall the beautifully told memoir. The thrill of reading the story is still with me, it was enjoyable. What a wonderful, fun, exciting childhood the author had.

Renee Cassese says

"Not the Mother I Remember" braids together Amber Starfire's childhood story with the stories she found in her mother's journals. She writes with magical detail and great sensitivity, showing how our memories of life are personal and not necessarily the same as those who lived through the same times. I believe every woman should read this book to see the honest expression of love and to learn how individual perspectives can be so different. Every woman who reads this book will wish she had her mother's journals to learn what the woman who raised her really thought and felt. A winner of a read.

Lynette Stow says

This well-written memoir is a poignant journey into the relationship between the author and her complicated mother. She paints a vivid picture of her mother as a bright, unconventional woman who was often thoughtless and destructive in her self-absorption. Her unrelenting quest for self-realization left a trail of broken relationships and damaged people in her wake. The stark contrast of her decline into the depths of Alzheimer's is well-portrayed and stirring, her mother at turns infuriating and pathetic. Though difficult mother-daughter relationships are not a unique subject for discussion, by any means, this one is effectively developed through the parallel viewpoints of the author and her mother. After her mother's death, the author wades through her journals and letters, striving to come to a better understanding of her as a person and of their relationship. She uses excerpts from those papers to present her mother's viewpoint throughout the memoir. Despite the overwhelming negativity of the relationship, the author doesn't allow this memoir to simply deteriorate into a diatribe. Although she describes in detail the hate she felt for her mother, the overall tone of the book is one of regret, tinged with gratitude and yes, even love.

There were several experiences and relationships where the author provided few details, and I would have liked to read more. I wanted more about the relationships the author had with her siblings and with the men who drifted in and out of her mother's life. She only hints at the damage done to the other characters in her mother's circle of influence. However, I realize that this is a memoir about her mother and her own relationship with her, not about everything else. And as memoir, there are areas in which she cannot possibly know all the details. I really enjoyed this book and give it five stars. I hope to read more by Ms. Starfire,

perhaps focusing on her own experiences as an adult, her relationships and her own ongoing story of personal growth.
