

[PDF] She Left Me The Gun: My Mother's Life Before Me

- pdf download free book

Books Details:

Title: She Left Me the Gun: My Mothe

Author:

Released: 2013-03-18

Language:

Pages: 352

ISBN:

ISBN13:

ASIN: B00B72L0RM



[CLICK HERE FOR DOWNLOAD](#)

pdf, mobi, epub, azw, kindle

Description:

Q&A with Emma Brockes

Q. What made you decide to go in search of your mother's life before she had you?

A. When I was growing up, my mother was always dropping hints that something terrible and dramatic had happened in her past. But she had never been terribly specific. When I was 27, she died, and I felt compelled to find out all the things she hadn't been telling me. When a parent dies, your relationship with their history changes; it becomes your own and all the things you were avoiding, it seems imperative, suddenly, to confront. Deciding to write about it was easy; it's an amazing story. Secrets like this were meant to be written about.

Q. What did you find when you went looking into your mother's past?

A. I knew she had moved to England from South Africa in 1960 and never really been back. So after her death, I flew to Johannesburg for the first time, to meet some of her seven siblings and ask them the questions I hadn't dared ask her. It turned out she and her siblings had been involved in a high profile court case, in which their father was the accused, and in which he had defended himself, cross-examining his own children in the witness box and destroying them one by one. It also turned out that my mother had tried, and failed, to kill him.

So, some fairly lively discoveries.

Q. You explore the ultimate question: how well do we know someone? Do you feel like you know your mother better now than before learning about her childhood trauma?

A. No, strangely. I think I always knew her at mineral level, the stuff I found out was merely an extreme expression of characteristics that were clearly present in my mother while I was growing up. The thing that amazed me most - the one out-of-character detail - was that she managed not to talk about it. My mum was the world's worst keeper of secrets.

Anyway it's something I worried about before starting the book; that whatever I found out would change my view of my mother and I would pathologise her in some way. As it turned out, I think there is only so much the imagination will let one do with one's parents; who they were to you when you were little, is who at some level they will always be. And so, while I admired my mother for the things I found out - how she stood up to a maniac; how she tried to protect her younger siblings; above all, how she rebuilt herself after it all went wrong - it didn't alter what was to me her basic mum-ness.

When I see her in my mind's eye these days, it's as I always saw her, sitting in the kitchen by the sink, peeling carrots or potatoes, looking out of the window at the garden and turning to smile at me as I come through the door.

Q. You mention in the book how some aspects of your own childhood started to make sense once you learned what'd happened to your mother. Do you think her experience had some psychological or emotional effect on you?

A. Very hard to measure, but I'm sure that it did, given the extent to which my mother's character was moulded by all this. She managed to put a positive spin on problematic impulses; so, when I was a kid, she was convinced I was going to get kidnapped and murdered, but instead of scaring the bejesus out of me, she managed to turn it into a comedy routine that assuaged her fears (a little) and didn't traumatize me. She was so bonkers about my exposure to risk, it has probably made me blasé; it's a great luxury, to have someone else do all your worrying for you.

After my mother's death, when I found out exactly what she'd been withholding, it struck me that she had made a moral, practical and aesthetic choice to be a certain way in relation to her past and I have definitely been influenced by the example she set. It's mainly a good thing; I don't see the point in going on about everything all of the time; although I probably tolerate discomfort longer than I should. (That might just be a British thing.)

Q. Your relatives in South Africa seemed to be at odds with one another, yet all were eager to connect with you. Are you still in touch with your family in South Africa?

A. Yes. I've been back to South Africa once, last year, and I speak to my aunt Fay on the phone occasionally. It's so far away that realistically, we're never going to operate like a regular family. But

it feels important to me to maintain contact. Most importantly, a generation on, we don't seem to be hampered by the fraughtness and baggage that dominated my mother's relationships with her siblings.

Q. How has this experience changed you? What has it taught you?

A. It has thrown my own childhood into a more idyllic light. Held up against the worst alternative, all the things you take for granted start to look like incredible good fortune. (Not that it has stopped me complaining. But still). It has also given me a shift in perspective. Here was the mother I had known, living a mild existence in a village in Buckinghamshire, meanwhile somewhere in her system was the memory of all this unbelievable trauma. In light of what I discovered, her achievement seemed remarkable. The one thing she couldn't do was talk about it, which is so often the case with abuse histories. Intellectually, I understood that nothing bad would happen if I wrote all this down and published it, but emotionally, that took a very long time to be the case. So the most profound change has been publishing this book and seeing for myself that the sky didn't fall in.

From Most regular tourists want “to look at places where great historical events occurred and drive to areas of natural beauty and feel uplifted by things that are bigger than we are.” But for British journalist Brockes, her journey to South Africa after her mother’s death is to uncover bitter family secrets and to find out what drove her mother to emigrate from Johannesburg to London. There is a lot Brockes does not know, “groping for a language to talk about the things we’d never talked about.” Does she want to know? With a mixture of sorrow and wry wit, she mocks those who find excitement in the scenic and the political as she uses her journalistic skills to access the national archives and discovers horrifying family abuse in her grandfather’s 1950s court case. But just as heartbreaking are the revelations of the tenderness in her struggling white working-class family. The close-up personal story will hold readers who want to understand the history tourists neither seek nor find. --Hazel Rochman

- Title: She Left Me the Gun: My Mother's Life Before Me
- Author:
- Released: 2013-03-18
- Language:
- Pages: 352
- ISBN:
- ISBN13:
- ASIN: B00B72L0RM

