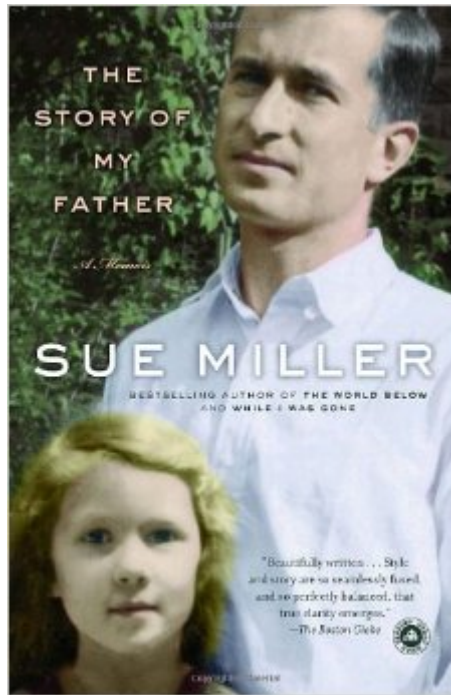


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The Story Of My Father: A Memoir



Synopsis

A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK In the fall of 1988, Sue Miller found herself caring for her father, James Nichols, once a truly vital man, as he succumbed to Alzheimer's disease. Beginning an intensely personal journey, she recalls the bitter irony of watching this church historian wrestle with his increasingly befuddled notion of time and meaning. She details the struggles with doctors, her own choices, and the attempt to find a caring response to a disease whose special cruelty is to diminish the humanity of those it strikes. In luminous prose, Sue Miller has fashioned a compassionate inventory of two lives, a memoir destined to offer comfort to all sons and daughters struggling to make peace with their fathers and with themselves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I pre-ordered this book after reading a review of its subject matter. Although I'm not sure it will reach a reading audience wider than those who know a family member or friend who has Alzheimer's, but it could educate others willing to read Miller's book. My father is a retired Episcopal priest who is afflicted with Alzheimer's-like dementia and is currently in a nursing home Alzheimer's unit after the death of my mother in 2001. Such nursing care was evidently, sadly, unavailable to Miller's father. My mother was my father's primary caregiver as he descended further into dementia, with its cruel behaviors expressed erratically, resulting in confusion for the afflicted person as well as emotional and physical abuses to those who knew him before this hideous disease destroyed his brain and much of his memory. My mother also tried to do those monumental caregiving tasks with very

minimal outside assistance. Not a good idea. It was her choice, despite my brother and myself trying to convince her otherwise. I know she saw it as an act of devotion to him, but with her own health problems ignored, she began to fail, both physically and mentally. Those who have dealt with Alzheimer's directly or indirectly, know that it is not uncommon for "devoted" caregivers to be the first to die almost literally from self-neglect. Miller's memoir of her father reminded me at times of my own relationships with my parents growing up, so I could relate to much of what she has written here. Like Miller, my academic background was in English and writing, including receiving a graduate degree in English. Unlike Miller, I became a licensed clinical social worker in recent years as a result of returning to graduate school for a second time to pursue a professional degree in that field.

This is Sue Miller's first nonfiction book about her father, James Nichols, who started showing signs of Alzheimer's disease (AD) well before he was picked up by the police after getting lost while driving his car. That incident, however, proved to be the moment of truth for his family yet Miller explains the tendency to repeatedly deny the disease: "It came and went anyway, and so again and again I was able to argue myself out of acknowledging it." Instances of acceptance are described too as she notes, "I found out there were still things I could learn from him, still things he could teach me, things that helped bring him home in my memory from the faraway land of his disease." Miller describes her father's slow progression through the disease and the resulting transitions from home care to different levels of residential care. She has few compliments for professional caregivers, suggesting that staff and families alike did not know how to care for persons with dementia when her father was diagnosed in 1986. Miller's sad and pleasant memories in the midst of his decline are placed within the context of her childhood and family of origin. She describes in detail many of the ways that her father's personality shaped her own way of thinking and her career as a writer. She recalls the cruel irony of watching her father, a church historian, wrestle with a disease that chipped away at his own history over a period of eight years. She does not write simply about his AD, for he had a fulfilling life before its onset. His life before and after the onset of his disease are examined as a whole. Miller does not wish to remember her father as a man rendered helpless. She tries to reclaim him as the loving parent he was for most of his long life.

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