



The funny, touching, gentle story of
an indomitable Norwegian-American
matriarch and her loving family

Kathryn Forbes

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Mama's Bank Account

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The charming adventures of the Mama of an immigrant Norwegian family living in San Francisco. This bestselling book inspired the play, motion picture, and television series *I Remember Mama*.

Mama's Bank Account Details

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Author : Kathryn Forbes

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Kathryn says

I had to spend some time in the ER and just happened to have this book in my purse. I read it in three hours while waiting for test results. The perfect book to read then. It's loving, sweet, funny, homey and wonderful reading. I loved every page.

Bill Kerwin says

This is the "novel" which forms the basis for the play and movie "I Remember Mama" written by John Van Druten. It is little more than a series of vignettes, but they are realistic as well as heart-warming and not unduly sentimental.

It tells the story of the hardscrabble existence of a Norwegian immigrant family in San Francisco in the early years of the 20th Century. Papa is a good man and a hard worker, but it is "Mama's" force of character and indomitable love which holds the family together.

I'm a big fan of the George Stevens' movie and especially of the luminous performance of a forty-nine-year-old Irene Dunne as "Mama" Marta Hanson. Forbes' book did not disappoint me and my fond memories of Dunne, and that in itself is a tribute to the book's honesty and sincerity.

Alicia says

I fell in love with this book in the first chapter. I didn't want to put it down. I enjoy sweet stories full of good family values. Mama reminded me of my grandmother. I was teary eyed by the end of most of the chapters. I read several chapters out loud to Dax, and he enjoyed them. I came across this title, when looking for something similar to A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. The writing is much simpler than Tree, but for me, I think the story is just as good.

Els says

Is good.

Angela says

This was such a PLEASANT book to read! Thanks to my sister for sharing her copy with me. It was the most basic story of human love and kindness displayed by a mother towards her family. Amazing how a little love and guidance can go such a long way! Required reading in my opinion!!

Vicky says

I really enjoyed this easy read. My only complaint...the end didn't feel right to me.

Bookworm says

To quote Katrin's dear mother, "Is good. Is very good." I loved the tales of her and her Norwegian family as they grew up in San Francisco, with the security of their parent's love, and Mama's Bank Account! It deserves every star.

Rebekah Morris says

This was a enjoyable read. I had watched "I Remember Mama" many years ago and don't really remember it much, but reading this book brought back little memories. Yet it was so much more than that. It is the story of a family. It wasn't a perfect family, and they didn't always agree, but what family does? Each chapter is a little story all its own, yet they build on the others to create a lovely tale.

Michelle says

Delightful! I was humbled by how patiently, yet determinedly, this mother worked toward solutions for her family's needs. She sacrificed, but without feeling martyred. Very memorable...

Kari says

If you want to feel warm and fuzzy about the little things that make life BIG, this book is for you!

Kate says

Sometimes when I am down I long for the era of polite books for grownups - books that don't need sex, violence, heartbreak, or 50-cent metaphors to entertain. Forbes' memoiresque style is sweet as she shares the travails of a Norwegian immigrant family in San Francisco. The title story is the nicest. Big thanks to the librarian who stuck this old book club edition (sternly marked No Renewals with a long-ago stamp) on the end-cap display for me to find. There is something friendly about paper so old the edges are soft.

Maam says

Definitely a feel good book. Loved the stories and loved Mama!

Leah says

I read this aloud to the kids for school. I thought it was a great book! The kids really seemed to enjoy it too. It's about a Norwegian immigrant family living in San Francisco during the early 1900s. It's written from the perspective of Kathryn, one of the daughters, and it's based on her own life. The warmth and family love make this book something special. "Mama" is a key character of each chapter and her resourcefulness, determination, and compassion really shine. I highly recommend this story. It's sort of like Little House on the Prairie -- Norwegian style.

Content Warning: One h-word on page 80.

Teri says

"I Remember Mama" is one of my Mom's favorite movies. She bought me a copy of it and for some reason I have not watched it yet. I came across this book that was the inspiration for the movie and play and tv series. I loved it! My Dad's father is from Norway, so I loved that Mama and Papa are from Norway. The stories are sweet and memorable. Love feel good books. I read some of it to my husband and he enjoyed it as well.

Mimi says

I have to preface my review with something my sister wrote in her review: "Mama is everything in a person that I wake up every morning wishing I could be. Also, if I were ever to try and write a book, this is the kind of book I would want it to be."

Mama seriously was amazing. This book is autobiographical; the author is writing about her family and Mama is the author's mother. The book was published 1943. I was impressed throughout the novel by Mama's common sense, wisdom, love, and work ethic.

Mama is definitely the kind of mother that I hope I can be to my children.

I really love books written during this time period. Life wasn't perfect, but they choose to focus on the parts that are inspiring and helpful. If you don't find "old" books slow and boring but rather beautiful and charming, then you will like this one.

The following excerpt was beautiful, in my opinion. How many families today would make those kind of sacrifices for a son or brother? I think many today would turn first to the government or a bank loan rather than give up personal time or enjoyments. (Although I am sure there are still families like this.)

"When Nels graduated from grammar school he wanted to go on to High. 'Is good,' Mama said, and Papa nodded approvingly.

'It will cost a little money,' Nels said.

Eagerly we brought up chairs and gathered around the table. I took down the gaily painted box that Aunt Sigrid had sent us from Norway one Christmas and laid it carefully in front of Mama.

This was the 'Little Bank.' Not to be confused, you understand, with the big Bank downtown. . . .

Nels had it all written out neatly. So much for carfare, for clothes, for notebooks and supplies. Mama looked at the figures for a long time. Then she counted out the money in the Little Bank. There was not enough.

She pursed her lips. 'We do not,' she reminded us gently, 'want to have to go to the Bank.'

We all shook our heads.

'I will work in Dillon's grocery shop after school,' Nels volunteered.

Mama gave him a bright smile and laboriously wrote down a sum and added and subtracted. Papa did it in his head. He was very quick on arithmetic. 'Is not enough,' he said. Then he took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at it for a long time. 'I give up tobacco,' he said suddenly.

Mama reached across the table and touched Papa's sleeve, but she didn't say anything. Just wrote down another figure.

'I will mind the Elvington children every Friday night,' I said. 'Christine can help me.'

'Is good,' Mama said.

We all felt very good. We had passed another milestone without having to go downtown and draw money out of Mama's Bank Account. The Little Bank was sufficient for the present."

"Mama said earnestly: 'Is not *good* for little ones to be afraid—to not feel secure.'"

All I can say about that quote is that I completely agree. It is an important job for a parent to help children feel safe and secure. Sadly, it is not always possible.

I really like how the following excerpt expresses the difference between a child *doing* something bad and actually *being* bad.

"Haltingly, I told her of my crime. And when I got to the part about Mrs. Schiller, she stopped rocking and just held me—tight.

I waited for Mama's answer. Mama could be strict, even stern, when we children had done wrong. I knew that I had sinned dreadfully, and now it was only right and just that I be punished.

Mama stood up so quickly I almost fell. She walked over to the sink and took a drink of water. Her back was so straight, so rigid, I started to cry again.

'Oh, please,' I begged. 'Please, Mama, don't you be angry too.'

She turned and hurried to me, took my shaking hands in hers.

'Not with you, Katrin,' she said earnestly. 'It is with—but, yes, that can wait. Now—look at me, Daughter.'

I looked into her quiet face, watched her mouth try to smile.

'This is important, my Katrin. Perhaps I cannot explain it so well, but you must not ever feel here'—she touched me—'in your heart, that you are what you said. A—a thief. A bad girl.'

'But, Mama, I did take them—and Mrs. Schiller said—'

'No, Mama, I guess I'm not *bad*.'

'Is good. Now, you will peel potatoes for dinner and set the table. I'—Mama's gentle voice hardened—I have a call to make.'

And Mama wasn't smiling a bit as she marched out the door."
