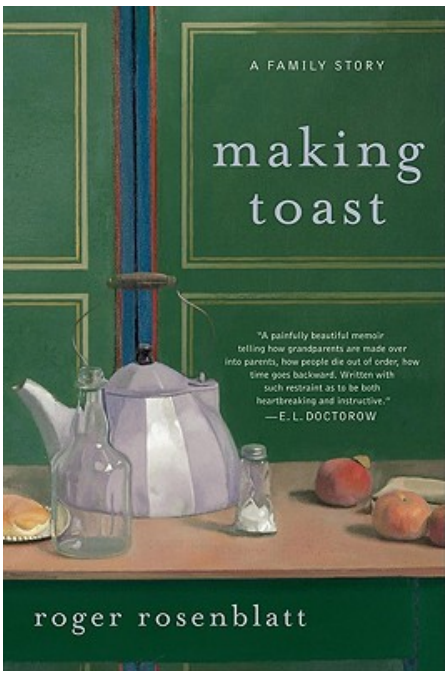

Making Toast

Roger Rosenblatt

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When his daughter, Amy-a gifted doctor, mother, and wife-collapsed and died from an asymptomatic heart condition, Roger Rosenblatt and his wife, Ginny, left their home on the South Shore of Long Island to move in with their son-in-law, Harris, and their three young grandchildren, six-year-old Jessica, four-year-old Sammy, and one year-old James, known as Bubbies. Long past the years of diapers, homework, and recitals, Roger and Ginny-Boppo and Mimi to the kids-quickly reaccustomed themselves to the world of small children: bedtime stories, talking toys, playdates, nonstop questions, and nonsequential thought. Though still reeling from Amy's death, they carried on, reconstructing a family, sustaining one another, and guiding three lively, alert, and tenderhearted children through the pains and confusions of grief. As he marveled at the strength of his son-in-law, a surgeon, and the tenacity and skill of his wife, a former kindergarten teacher, Roger attended each day to 'the one household duty I have mastered'-preparing the morning toast perfectly to each child's liking.

With the wit, heart, precision, and depth of understanding that has characterized his work, Roger Rosenblatt peels back the layers on this most personal of losses to create both a tribute to his late daughter and a testament to familial love. The day Amy died, Harris told Ginny and Roger, "It's impossible". Roger's story tells how a family makes the possible of the impossible.

Making Toast Details

Date	:	Published February 16th 2010 by Ecco (first published 2010)
ISBN	:	9780061825934
Author	:	Roger Rosenblatt
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From Reader Review Making Toast for online ebook

Rachelle Urist says

Part 1 is my initial reaction to the book.
Part 2 is my review for the Washtenaw Jewish News.

1. A moving account of the sad, busy year following the sudden death of the author's 38 year old daughter, a pediatrician and the mother of three young children. The author and his wife move in with the grandchildren and their father, also a physician. The year of mourning includes the joys and concerns of children, the loving resourcefulness of the grandparents, the worries about their son-in-law and the grandparents' indefatigable efforts at maintaining a kind of normalcy for the family. Roger Rosenblatt is an accomplished and award-winning writer of books. His career in journalism includes years on the staff of several prominent publications. He is modest about his accomplishments. He throws his all into observing his own and his family's ways of coping. The book is punctuated with wonderful anecdotes that reflect the ages and images conjured by children in the face of dreadful loss.

2. Roger Rosenblatt's Making Toast is a memoir of the year following the death of his 38 year old daughter, Amy, a pediatrician and mother of three young children. Roger and his wife, Ginny, immediately drive from Long Island to Bethesda, Maryland, to pitch in. They learn from their son, who lives near Amy's family, that her husband, Harris, a hand surgeon, was summoned by the two older children, ages 6 and 4, who found their mother collapsed on the treadmill. "Mommy's not talking," the kids tell him. Though he arrives within seconds, the CPR he administers fails to revive her.

The cause of her sudden death was "due to an anomalous right coronary artery"—meaning that her two coronary arteries fed her heart from the same side. Physical exertion led to increased blood flow which was suddenly cut off. "Her condition," writes Rosenblatt, "affecting less than two thousandths of one percent of the population, was asymptomatic; she might have died at any time in her life."

The grandparents, Roger and Ginny Rosenblatt, become permanent and welcome members of the household. Roger, known to his grandchildren as "Boppo," becomes a specialist in making toast. Ginny, or "Mimi," as she is called by the grandchildren, becomes the children's surrogate mom.

Roger Rosenblatt writes in simple sentences in present tense, with a humility that belies his achievements. To cope with the unimaginable, the death of his beloved, vibrant and vital daughter, he keeps a journal that becomes this memoir. He immerses himself in the here and now, partly to be useful, partly to numb the pain. The grief is overwhelming. It is made tolerable only by submitting to the daily and routine tasks of life—and by recording his thoughts and perceptions.

Rosenblatt leavens this memoir by deftly weaving in the kind of anecdotes normally reserved for kvelling—the proud tales of a grandparent. Six year old Jessie demands: "Do your Nutcracker dance, Boppo!," and he swings into his improvised ballet, "the high point of which is when I wiggle my ass like the dancing mice." He becomes so involved with the grandchildren, that the reader might think he is just one more doting grandparent. He is more. He is a gifted man of letters, the author of 17 books and six plays. He won two George Polk Awards, a Peabody Award, and an Emmy for the essays he wrote, during over 25 years of his tenure at Time Magazine and The NewsHour on PBS. Two of his books, Kayak Morning and The Boy Detective, were New York Times notable books. Others were national bestsellers. Children of War, an examination of children's reactions to their experiences of war, won the Robert F. Kennedy Book Prize

and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Rosenblatt has a Ph.D. in English Literature from Harvard, where he joined the faculty at age 22. He received seven honorary doctorates and is now Distinguished Professor of English and Writing at Stony Brook University. But Rosenblatt wears his accomplishments lightly. In this book, he offers only a glimpse of his stature by noting, almost in passing, public interviews he is scheduled to conduct with major literary figures. He showers lavish praise on those he most loves and admires: his wife, Ginny, a former kindergarten teacher, and his son-in-law, Harris.

How did this man of letters become “Boppo” to his grandchildren? He explains: “Just before Jessie was born, Amy asked Ginny and me what our grandparental names would be. Ginny chose “Mimi,” after her own grandmother. I chose “El Guappo,”—the handsome one—the nickname of an ineffective former Red Sox relief pitcher. The babies could not pronounce El Guappo, thus Boppo.” In telling this story, Rosenblatt recalls how his daughter rued the devolution of her father’s honorific: “Such a sad story. He thought of himself as the handsome one [El Guappo], but he became a clown [Boppo].”

Making Toast is written with sensitivity and astute powers of observation. Rosenblatt mentions an incident in which his son-in-law, Harris, begins to shout when someone steps in to help sweep up a broken glass after he drops it. But Harris never shouts, Rosenblatt tells us. Rosenblatt understands the outburst to mean that the bereft husband is “asserting his authority—not because of a lack of self-confidence, but rather as a way of holding his life together.”

For Rosenblatt, writing is the way to hold life together. He asserts that what keeps him from seeking psychological help is this: “What happened to Amy, and to all of us, is real. The monster is real. And while there may be strategies that help Ginny and me feel a little better rather than a little worse, we will never feel right again. No analysis or therapy will change that.”

He tells of reviewing Deaf Sentence, by David Lodge: “about a retired linguistics professor who is losing his hearing and who is also deaf to life until, against his will, he visits Auschwitz, where the silence teaches him to hear. He reads a letter from a prisoner in the camp to his wife, discovered in a pile of human ashes. One sentence rises up: ‘If there have been, at various times, trifling misunderstandings in our life, now I see how one was unable to value the passing time.’ As far as I can tell, this is how to live—to value the passing time.”

This book, Making Toast, came to my attention through a friend, who mentioned it as “a book by a friend of mine, Roger Rosenblatt.” My friend talked about the book and about sitting shiva in the same breath. I assumed that the book would include Jewish customs and symbols. I was surprised when I found, instead, descriptions of the family’s Christmas preparations, Easter decorations, and other such observances. The Rosenblatts, says the author, favor child-oriented celebrations. Yet Roger Rosenblatt, however secular, believes in God—the God of James Joyce. This is not a beneficent God. This is a God who doesn’t care. Rosenblatt reports that a friend was in Jerusalem when he heard the news of Amy’s death. The friend went to the Wailing Wall and kicked it, adding: “F___ you, God!” That, says Rosenblatt, summed things up. But he also believes in getting on with life. Hence the book. Unfortunately, though perhaps not surprisingly, completing the book did not end his mourning. That continues. Kayak Morning, written two and a half years after Amy’s death, is a meditation on grief. Rosenblatt marvels that no matter how much time elapses, the pain remains profound.

Rosenblatt told a psychologist friend that writing Making Toast was a kind of therapy, a way of keeping Amy alive; but after he finished, it was as if she died again. His friend responded: “Grief comes to you all at once, so you think it will be over all at once. But it is your guest for a lifetime.”

In the subsequent book, Kayak Morning, Rosenblatt wrote: "This morning when I climbed into my kayak

and headed out, I knew that I would be going nowhere, as I have been going nowhere for the past two and a half years. But my love for my daughter makes somewhere out of nowhere. In this boat, on this creek, I am moving forward, even as I am moving in circles. Amy returns in my love, alive and beautiful. I have her still."

Why read about such sorrow? Because in filtering his private tragedy into this memoir, Rosenblatt has created a thing of beauty. It is comforting, edifying, uplifting. Not only do we see the practical and beneficent effects of love showered by grandparents on their grandchildren and son-in-law, we also see why writing is important. Rosenblatt, who has long taught creative writing, consolidates and confirms his conviction that the point of writing is to make suffering endurable and love possible. In his 2011 book, Unles the world, if one can make grief intelligible, if one can make it all beautiful and thus lovable, then life is worth living. He posits that by affirming life through writing, os It Moves the Human Heart: The Craft and Art of Writing, he writes that if one can rise above all the suffering, injustice and evil inne makes a contribution to the world. With this book, he proves his thesis.

Ellen says

Amy, the author's daughter, dies suddenly, leaving her husband and three young children. Roger and Ginny move into the family home to help Amy's husband raise Jessie, Sammy, and Bubbies, the baby.

The author's memoir leads the reader through the first fourteen months after Amy's death as he learns his new duties (such as making the morning toast.)

Like Tracey Kidder, Rosenblatt doesn't overwrite or overanalyze. When he describes Sammy imitating his mother's dead body by lying on the floor with his tongue hanging out or how Jessie draws a family portrait with everyone standing but her mother, who's shown prone on the floor, we get it. But he's also an appreciator, not only of the children's gifts and talents, but of the endless work his wife and son-in-law put into caring for the family.

Near the end of Making Toast, Roger admits that up until his daughter's death he'd led a charmed life, with less than his share of hardship. Now, late in the day, he's having to learn to learn patience and endurance and how to live with loss. At the end of the year he speaks with the family psychotherapist who tells him that it may even get harder after the first year, when it hits home that life is what it is. And yet, being there, getting on with it, is what works for them now.

Sharon says

I finished reading this today. It was a quick read. A bit boring after about a third of the way through. It seems like it should have been shorter, or longer with a story line. Instead it reads a bit like a memoir with stories from the present and past mixed in. We don't really get to know Amy. We mostly see how her family lives

on after her death.

As with all stories of this fashion, I compare my own story of my husband's illness and death. The Solomons are lucky in that they have the grandparents who can drop everything and come to live with them. They also do not need to worry about money. Well, that was never brought up and Harris is a surgeon so my assumption is that they are doing well enough. Private pre-schools, music lessons, day trips to New York, visits with therapists are things that don't happen to most families after a parent has died. Death comes to all, but some people are better equipped, at least financially, than other.

I had not heard of Roger Rosenblatt before. I was a little put off by his name dropping. And I am not sure if his Boppo the Great anthem is said with tongue in cheek or not.

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piperitapitta says

Making toast

Quando Roger Rosenblatt inizia scrivere i primi appunti per questo memoir, sono trascorsi appena sei mesi dalla morte della figlia Amy.
Una morte improvvisa, avvenuta nel soggiorno di casa dove Amy, trentotto anni appena, moglie e madre di tre bambini, si stava allenando sul tapis roulant.
Una morte improvvisa e imprevedibile, causata da una anomalia cardiaca che mai nessuno aveva diagnosticato prima, che stravolge le vite di tutti: del marito Harris, dei suoi tre bambini di sei, quattro anni e quattordici mesi, dei familiari tutti, fratelli, suoceri e genitori.
Soprattutto quella dei genitori, che in accordo con il genero decidono di lasciare la loro casa di Quogue a Long Island e di trasferirsi nel Maryland nella casa della figlia, per aiutarlo a occuparsi dei tre bambini e della loro nuova complessa quotidianità.
Mi piace pensare che Rosenblatt (importante giornalista su testate come il Washington Post e il New York Times) abbia preso appunti disorganici - qui riuniti sotto forma di memoir - ma da qualche parte ho letto che iniziarono ad uscire sotto forma di brevi articoli su uno dei giornali sui quali scriveva - che abbia iniziato a scrivere su post-it, tovaglioli di carta, fogli su cui, magari, sul retro c'erano i disegni di Jessica, o di Sam. Perché, almeno all'inizio, credo che di spazio individuale, anche per il proprio dolore, i nonni promossi a genitori di riserva, ne abbiano avuto molto poco, impegnati com'erano nella gestione familiare.
Ed è questo, forse, l'aspetto che rasserena di questi scritti: il fatto che il dolore, l'incredulità e la rabbia, abbiano potuto trovare uno sfogo naturale nella vitalità della crescita, nella necessità costante di attenzioni, di abbracci, di sorrisi.
Mi piace pensare che anche Rosenblatt, così come C.S. Lewis (autore di Diario di un dolore, scritto dopo la morte della moglie e che il giornalista e scrittore nomina ad altro proposito), abbia avuto bisogno di scrivere, usando il mezzo che più gli è congeniale, per elaborare, espettorare la sofferenza, mettere dei puntelli che testimoniassero il suo percorso interiore.
I suoi scritti raccontano quasi un anno e mezzo "senza Amy", un anno e mezzo in cui *Making Toast. A Family Story.* (il bellissimo titolo originale) diventa il fulcro della nuova vita di una nuova famiglia atipica alle prese con le esigenze più banali, come quella di preparare i toast per la colazione della famigliola, alla ricerca dell'equilibrio che le restituisca la quotidianità perduta.
Non quello che c'era prima, perché "nulla sarà come prima", ma solo la serenità che è data dai piccoli gesti di ogni giorno.

Mi sono ritrovata a pensare che se esiste una scrittura del lutto, una terapia della scrittura per chi è stato colpito da un grave lutto - oltre a Lewis e a Rosenblatt penso anche a Isabelle Allende, a Joan Didion, a Helen Humphreys - esiste sicuramente anche un destinatario corrispondente della stessa, e cioè chi ha bisogno di queste letture: noi che abbiamo subito lo stesso trauma e che troviamo nelle parole di chi è capace di raccontarci il nostro stesso dolore, il potere pacificatore della lettura e della letteratura.
Credo di essere grata a questi autori, anzi ne sono certa, perché stiamo facendo un lungo cammino insieme, un cammino durante il quale mi stanno offrendo non solo un appoggio, e non solo la possibilità di riconoscere e unire la mia voce alla loro, ma anche quella di guardare altro, di sentirmi parte di un tutto che è sì doloroso, ma è soprattutto condivisione, assenza di solitudine, empatia allo stato puro.
E così, ora che sono trascorsi nove anni dalla morte di Amy, mi verrebbe voglia di sentire Roger per chiedergli se lui e sua moglie sono tornati nella loro bella e tranquilla casa vicino New York e se lui insegna sempre all'università, ma soprattutto, ora che Jessica, Sam e James hanno quindici, tredici e dieci anni, chiedergli com'è cambiata ancora la loro vita è cosa fanno. E Harris, cosa ne è stato di Harris, è riuscito a trovare un po' di spazio per se stesso, a vivere il suo dolore fino in fondo?
Perché alla fine è così, la vita continua, la vita vince sempre, e *making toast* alla fine vuol dire anche brindare, brindare alla vita che resta, continua, ricomincia.

”In un altro paese la gente muore”, che cosa significa?, ho chiesto alla classe? "Significa che la morte accade agli altri", ha risposto un ragazzo.

Will Byrnes says

Roger Rosenblatt’s daughter Amy was 38, a doctor, a wife and a mother of three small children when she died. Making Toast is Rosenblatt’s memoir of how he, his wife, Ginny, and the people Amy left behind coped with their loss. Roger and Ginny moved in with their son-in-law, Harris, and helped raise their grandkids. He writes of the day to day activities of parenting anew, of the questions the children ask, the decisions and steps required to continue living. It is a quiet book. I almost felt as if there was a hush in the room as I read it. The story is, of course, very sad, and I went through more than a few tissues over the course of this short book. But love, caring and understanding offer structures around which one can reconstruct. Rosenblatt’s is a simple story, beautifully written, engaging and very, very human.

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When I first saw Amy, curled up in the little white hospital blanket, I remembered what John Kelleher, a professor or Irish Studies at Harvard, and the father of four girls, had told me about fathers and daughters: “Every girl child peers up from her crib, sees her old man, and thinks, ‘Sucker.’”

[As the father of two girls, I felt compelled to include the above quote. It is so true.]

BTW, Rosenblatt's Thomas Murphy was my favorite novel of 2016. There is a significant stream in it regarding a grandfather and grandson.

Roxanne says

I thought I would love this book, but I had a big problem getting over a few issues.

I understand the feelings of unfairness in Amy's death, but like the nanny stated, they had resources that few people in their same situation had. They were better equipped in many areas than others. Rosenblatt does address this somewhat at the very end of the book, but I wish it would have come earlier.

Names, names, names. I zoned out when new people were introduced. Rosenblatt continued this throughout the entire book. I could have given Rosenblatt a break, but he is an author. He should have known how boring it would be to the reader to keep having names thrown at you that really added nothing to the story.

I know we often think our kids are the best looking, hardest working, most perfect, but frankly Rosenblatt made me dislike his family the more he "perfectionized" them. I believe he overdid it in a very subtle manner-- Amy had had a parade of boyfriends in high school and college...

What I did love about the book is the interaction between the adults and children. Because the children are so young, the conversations are innocent and honest. They made me laugh. I won't forget Jess's riddle to his grandfather -- "A man came over on Friday, stayed two days, and went home on Friday. How is that possible?" (Friday is a horse.)

I think it would be interesting for Rosenblatt to write another follow-up book in a few years sharing with the readers how the family is currently coping.

Everyone deals with death sooner or later. It does not matter who you are or what you have. It does change who you are and how you live.

Caitlin says

This is a spare, even elegant memoir about the aftermath of tragedy. The author's daughter, Amy, died on her treadmill from a rare congenital heart problem leaving behind her grieving children. Mr. Rosenblatt and his wife immediately moved in with their son-in-law and the three children and started the process of figuring out life after Amy.

All death has its own flavor, its own level of tragedy - the sudden death of a loved one is hard because there is no preparation - there is simply before and after. In an instant you cross the line between what was and what is now and I'm not sure you ever fully recover. Perhaps the hardest part is the grieving you do for the person you might've been - its maddening, angering, terrifying, and difficult.

Mr. Rosenblatt writes well of this and there are moments in this book when I wiped away tears. This could have been either so painful it couldn't be borne or so trite and cliched it couldn't be read, but it is neither. It is sharp, clear and focused with loving portraits of a family, particularly the three children.

I have some discomfort with this book, some choices that lessened its impact for me. The author tends to name drop famous people who are bereft by the loss of his daughter and, while I understand that these are family friends, it also feels out of place in the larger context of memoir. I was also troubled by the basic non-portrayal of their Fillipino nanny, who extended her hours to help the family and who reminds them of how

many more resources they have than most. It strikes me odd that her presence is peripheral and unimportant, although the author notes how much the children love her.

Lastly, I heard an interview with the author on NPR where the interviewer basically fawned over him and his book, yet neither he nor the interviewer acknowledged his long history with PBS. I was very uncomfortable with that once I read the book and it heightened some of the problems in the book that prevent its beautiful writing from soaring to its potential height.

Jenna says

I blew through this book in seven hours. It has been awhile since I've read a memoir that I didn't find trite or even annoying at times. This particular one had me laughing, crying, laughing again and mostly nodding my head. While my living children are still with me, I have endured two family deaths in less than a month. The grief has been overwhelming at times. I simply needed this book at this point.

I came across it only because I randomly stopped on a radio talk show in which Rosenblatt was discussing his book as well as taking calls from others enduring the grieving process. I listened, unable to change the channel. Similarly, I read, unable to put the book down.

The book offers no answers. Death is complicated. Grief is more so. What the book does offer is something many grieving need to understand. Memories come up. Life goes on. Trouble arise. Life still goes on. I am so glad that Rosenblatt first wrote the essay and was encourage to continue on with the entire memoir.

Lynn says

Sad, touching memoir of a family finding their way after the death of Amy: daughter, wife, sister, friend, and mother, as told by her father. It's not overly sad and is, actually, hopeful especially for the young children left behind. This is the kind of family we all wish for - strong, supportive and loving. One feels sure that though Amy's death will always color their lives, the family members will all survive intact.

My one quarrel with this book is near the end when Amy's brother, Carl is trying to teach his young son, Andrew about the concept of human fallibility. Andrew disagrees and cites Eric Carle "...author and illustrator of one of his first books, Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" as never making a mistake. Is this supposed to be irony? Eric Carle is the illustrator but you won't find the book under that heading in any library - since the author is Bill Martin Jr. Wouldn't one author be sensitive to another by checking the facts? Shouldn't his editor have caught that? Am I being too picky? Maybe it's the Children's Librarian in me.

Kathy says

This was a GoodReads First-Reads Selection…and what an excellent book! I don’t know where to begin raving about it. It’s a memoir of Roger Rosenblatt’s 38-year old daughter, Amy, who died suddenly from a heart problem. Roger and his wife move in with Amy’s husband, and their three young children. What special people Roger and his wife Ginny were to not even hesitate to come to the aid of their son-in-law! I

cried in so many parts of the book. Roger shares his family's life and celebrates Amy's life and her legacy. Roger would post a "Word of the Day" for the two older grandchildren in the morning. What a smart way to introduce words and how they could relate to the grandchildren. One of their family customs was to always say, "Love you" at the end of a phone conversation. I was so touched by this because it is one of our family traditions as well that we have passed onto our three daughters. Lastly, on Amy's twenty-first birthday, Ginny wrote her a letter. Again I was brought to tears by her wish for her daughter. I thought of my three daughters as well. "I wish you work that matters. I wish you the joy of great love in marriage. I wish you the beauty and fulfillment that comes from being a mother." Pick up this wonderful heartfelt book!

Heidi Miller says

I loved this book. It brought back the hell and heartbreak our family entered into three years ago tomorrow. It reminded me of the pain of my displaced father and how terribly difficult that must have been for him. It reminded me of all of my children and the difficult yet very different pain they each have had to endure and navigate through. It is a pain and a loss none of us could ever, ever have imagined. We have all grown through this experience. I would like to think we are more aware of others pains and more compassionate. But, the thing i loved the most about this book is that it really reminded me of all of the friends, family acquaintances and even strangers who reached out to us. The MANY, MANY loving prayers were without a doubt felt and greatly needed and appreciated. I felt God holding me in the palm of his hand. I cannot deny this. So many of you sent flowers, cards, letters, books, brought food, some for weeks even months. People just helped me hold it together. I cannot thank each and every one of you enough. I wish I could have written all of you a personal thank you, but honestly i feel like it was all I could do just to hold myself together. Please know of my sincere love and gratitude to all of you. We all seem to be doing well most days. There isn't one day that goes by that we don't miss my mom or the kids their grandmother. She was the BEST!! Tomorrow will be a difficult day but it will be one more year we have made it through.

Again, thank you everyone!!
XOXO,
Heidi MIller

AzulClarito says

Recopilación de los artículos que se publicaron en el The New Yorker, luego de Amy la hija de 38 años de Roger Rosenblatt autor de este libro muriera por un paro cardíaco.
Con frases a veces crudas, nos vamos viendo inmersos en el dolor de un padre por la perdida de una hija, la fortaleza de la madre de esta para no caerse, un marido que de pronto y sin previo aviso se convierte en viudo Como niños pequeños que se quedan sin su mamá tienen que adaptarse a esta nueva forma de vida, la perdida se convierte en un común denominador de todas las personas que lo rodean, son identificamos ya que todos en algún momento perdemos a un ser querido.

"Estoy aprendiendo lo que la mayoría de la gente aprende a una edad mucho más temprana: Que la vida es algo que hay que soportar, con recompensas que es necesario ganarse."

Como son artículos cortos es muy fácil de leer y rápido, más que recomendado!! Tener en cuenta que es casi como un diario donde nos metemos en la cabeza del autor, recuerden que no es una novela o historia con

inicio, nudo y desenlace. Como describe E.L Doctorow "Unas memorias de una errible belleza, escritas con tanta contención que resultan tan desgarradoras como instructivas"

Barbara Mader says

Tough to rate this one. I wanted to like it more than I did; maybe it just wasn't what I expected. The tone is very restrained, which I tend to like and did like up to a point, but it also seemed like he was afraid of his subject matter, and couldn't be as honest as he probably should have been (if you're going to get it at all right, I think you have to be fearless). The quality of the writing itself seemed OK, but he came across as emotionally underdeveloped and rather narcissistic. It doesn't hold a candle to Didion's Year of Magical Thinking (imo).

He does idealize his daughter; of course I get that. But it made her a two-dimensional figure.

The other quibbles I have are more to do with his, well, seeming immaturity, or narcissism, not his writing. This guy has been incredibly fortunate all his life--money, health, brains, education, smart and successful kids, and apparently a wife who has kept his personal life easy and comfortable and acted as a buffer between himself and any emotional hardship. In the book he writes about his perfect daughter; his good-looking and amazing but not quite perfect wife; his perfect sons and perfect son-in-law; the perfect marriage and life his daughter had; his perfect, brilliant, motherless grandchildren. And he himself is very clever and intelligent and has famous friends and so is very important.

His daughter's death at age 38 is completely unfair. Yes. It is. But even though it is clear he knows others who have suffered the death of a child, he still seems to think that he was too special to have had any cloud on his horizon, let alone something like this, that other people may have to suffer but he does not. It kind of got to me after a while. I think this guy thinks his daughter's death was a personal insult directed at him and his family. I kept thinking of people I knew whose children or spouses died. None of them had the sort of resources these people have, with their money, their nanny, their large homes, the grandparents moving in for a year to help with the children, the wealthy and famous friends. It's great for this family they do have those resources. But what about the single working mom or dad who earns maybe 35K/year and is juggling all the things they're juggling, all by herself, or himself? Heck, this family has four adults living with three kids, and seemingly unlimited amounts of money. They have the means and know-how to do whatever is necessary to help themselves and the children through this.

As someone who constantly thinks of how fortunate I've been in life thus far, yet knowing it could all change in a moment, I began to wonder his this guy ever thought that way at all. Didn't he ever think, during all those years and decades of good fortune, "I have been so lucky, so fortunate thus far. We are so fortunate. I must remember to be grateful for all these years of joy." I know this sounds cold; his daughter is dead, and probably I am being too hard on him. But honestly, toward the end of the book I was really starting to get annoyed with his seeming inability to be just one of billions in an unfair world. Only in the very last bit did he finally address some of this stuff, admitting he had lived a charmed life until this happened, that he really has no clue how to deal with the reality of the world.

I guess I could summarize my opinion of the book something like this: This is a book written by a man whose daughter died at age 38. She was survived by a husband and three young children and two brothers and a mother as well as her father. The father is a pretty good writer who seems never to have really looked at the hard things in life, having been spared them up to this point. He is angry that his perfect daughter's life

has been cut short and that his own perfectly happy life has been tarnished, but seems unable to move deeply into his feelings (or else to convey those feelings in the book), and he seems very unwilling to do the difficult work required to grow up in this area of his life. He writes a little book, episodic and loosely organized (and not a little self-congratulatory) about his daughter and family to help himself feel better. He doesn't seem to have really learned much from any of it, but he is not a bad guy, just seems lacking in insight.

Nicole Harkin says

This is a heart wrenching, yet not dramatic, look into a family faced with tragedy. Mr. Rosenblatt's daughter suddenly dies while running on her treadmill from an undiagnosed heart problem. She was 38, the mother of three, and a doctor.

We are lead along as Mr. Rosenblatt describes, in largely chronological vignettes, how his life changed after his daughter's death. We hear his thinking out loud about how his relationships with everyone have changed. We are made aware of the kind of fugue people walk around in after they lose someone. We suffer other losses with Mr. Rosenblatt.

The two lines that spoke greatest to me where first, when the children's nanny tells Mr. Rosenblatt that: "You are not the first to go through such a thing, and you are better able to handle it than most." The other line that spoke to me was about the need to value the passing of time. Quoted from David Loge's Deaf Sentence, "If there have been, at various times, trifling misunderstanding in our life, now I see how one was unable to value the passing of time." So true.

Mr. Rosenblatt tells the reader at one point that his two sons go into have their heart tested, to make sure it will not happen to them as well, but Mr. Rosenblatt leaves the reader hanging on this one point: we never find out if his sons are ok. No news is good news I suppose.

Worth a quick read or as a gift to a grieving friend.

Laura says

I understand why people write books after the death of a loved one: it's cathartic. I'm less understanding of why we read them. If we don't know the people involved, what's the gain? Is it that we hope we'll handle our losses with more dignity? That death will be comprehensible? I really don't know...

This slight series of pensees (too short to be essays, not coherent enough to be anything more) doesn't offer much in the way of spiritual guidance. Rather, it's simply a father trying to make sense of his daughter's death and trying to help her family heal.

ARC provided by publisher.
