



Story Circle Book Reviews

[*5.0 out of 5 stars*](#) A remarkable exploration of memoir and memory

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"When my father took my six-year-old sister on a trip to kill a deer, the deer killed him. They were still winding their way Up North, driving the four-hour trip from suburban Detroit to the country. In the pre-dawn fog, a buck ran into the middle of the road, the soft-top Jeep crashed, turned upside down, and crushed my father. My sister survived, and my mother was left to care for three small, bewildered children on her own. My brother was nine, I was seven. My father was thirty-two, my mother twenty-nine. The year was 1974."

This was the family story that Harrigan imagined and embraced, the story that so comforted her with its repetitions that it came to be the truth. Thus opens one of the most fascinating, honest explorations of memory and memoir in my experience.

The author's father lost his right hand and forearm in his teens, in an accident with dynamite. Many years later, on a day when Harrigan's teenaged son spoke of his reluctance to talk about his own father, she encouraged him to do so. Quietly he replied, "When are you going to talk about your father?" The question transformed in time into the journey Harrigan would take, beyond her childhood imaginations, to find her own father's true story.

"I always hated Father's Day. Did I need a holiday to remind me that I couldn't remember my father?" began the story Harrigan read to her peers at a 2013 writing residency program. Attendees gathered around her after the reading and talked enthusiastically, not about her story or even her father, but about their own fathers. This, of course, was the best possible outcome, she mused. Later, when she posted the story on her blog, a wellspring of conversation opened with her brother about their father. Further conversations with her other sibling and her mother evoked poignant contrasts as her sister was unable to talk about their father, while her mother easily responded to all Harrigan's questions.

Following her abundant harvest of new knowledge about her father, Harrigan realized that one more vital step remained: to make a list of questions and take her own trip Up North to visit the aunt and uncle she hadn't seen in decades, who knew her dad intimately, and who rounded out the story for Harrigan.

Without condition, I recommend this five-star memoir (a finalist in the Sarton Women's Book Awards that honor women's lives), as a must-read for anyone seeking an excellent story, as well as a study of the intricacies of memory and memoir.

by Mary Jo Doig
for Story Circle Book Reviews
reviewing books by, for, and about women