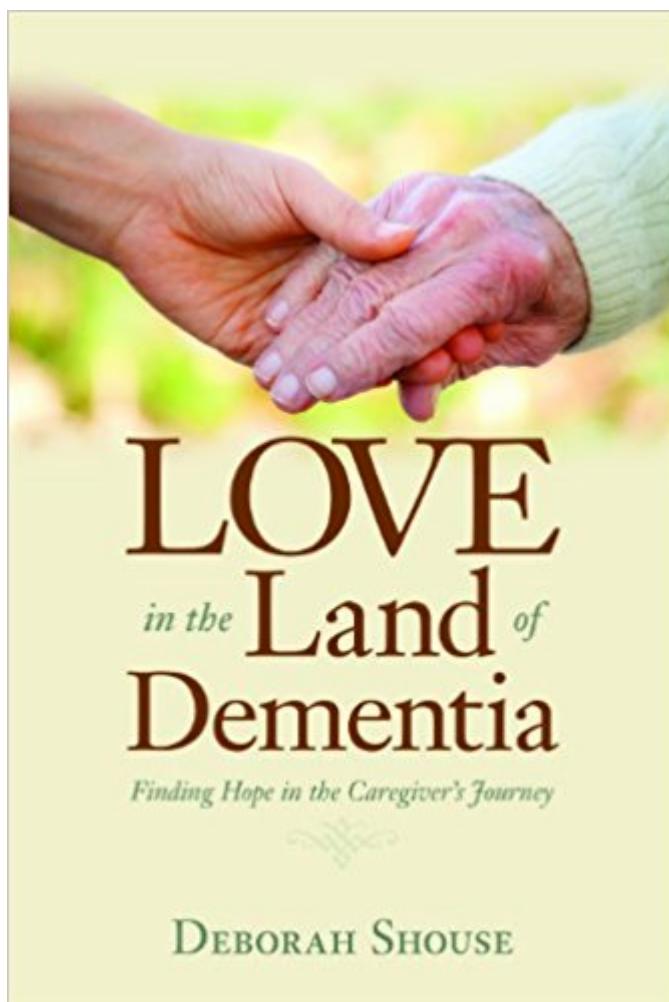


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Love In The Land Of Dementia: Finding Hope In The Caregiver's Journey



Synopsis

For many families, a diagnosis of dementia is an ending. For Deborah Shouse, it was a beginning, "My mother taught me how to celebrate and appreciate what we have right now." Through her mother's dementia, Deborah discovered compassion, deepening love, and increased connection with her mother and her family. Love in the Land of Dementia offers hope to family members, friends, and care partners of people who are living with memory loss. Strong, fluid organization and tender writing distinguish this purposeful and compelling read, which is filled with practical suggestions, compassionate support, and unexpected insights. Deborah Shouse's writing has appeared in the Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, Reader's Digest, Newsweek, Woman's Day, Hemispheres, Family Circle, Spirituality & Health, Chicago Tribune, and Ms. She writes a weekly column on love stories for the Kansas City Star, and has co-authored Working Woman's Communications Survival Guide, which is in its fifth printing, and Antiquing for Dummies. She has written several memoirs and business books and has been featured in more than a dozen Chicken Soup books.

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Customer Reviews

Deborah Shouse's writing has appeared in The Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor, Reader's Digest, Newsweek, Woman's Day, Hemispheres, Family Circle, Spirituality & Health, Chicago Tribune, and MS. She writes a weekly column on love stories for the Kansas City Star, and coauthored Working Woman's Communications Survival Guide, which is now in its fifth printing, and

Antiquing for Dummies. She has written several memoirs and business books and has been featured in more than a dozen Chicken Soup books.

What is refreshing about Deborah Shouse's book is that she offers hope, practical advice and inspiration for caregivers, especially those whose loved ones suffer from Alzheimer's disease in her book, Love in the Land of Dementia. This is a beautifully written, captivating story of Shouse and her aging parents. She begins when her mom shows the first signs of dementia in 1997, and she continues until her mother's death in 2004. Her mother's story begins with simple tales of forgetfulness and confusion, while her father tries to come to terms with this woman who looks like the same person he married. But her personality is changing. He even states, "I want a divorce." After her father suffers from a stroke, Shouse convinces her parents to sell their home in Memphis, Tennessee, and move to a retirement community near her in Kansas City. However, her mother seems to quickly succumb to her illness. Within three months, she is moved to an assisted living facility. She wanders into other patients' rooms; she refuses to bathe. She sometimes urinates in the hallway. Eventually, her care becomes too much for the assisted living facility, too. Shouse continues her mother's story, sharing the grief she and her father often experience, along with frustration and anger. But the one message that comes out during this memoir time and again is how Shouse learned to love her mother at each stage of Alzheimer's. She stopped comparing her to the woman she used to be and started finding joy in her mother's daily life. One of the most touching scenes that Shouse shares is how her mother would often go through the day extremely confused, quiet, combative and not recognizing her or her father. However, when her father first came into the hospital room, her mother would always light up and say, "This is my husband." This is one of the ways that Shouse, her brother and father learned to find love in the land of dementia.

Shouse shares her journey as a caregiver in her beautiful book, Love in the Land of Dementia. Watching a parent transform because of dementia can be an earth-shattering experience. Instead of being overcome with sorrow, Shouse takes this experience as an opportunity to explore how to love her mother in new ways. She writes beautiful prose that is smart, insightful and most importantly compassionate. The tone is so remarkable. She shows curiosity, respect, humor, and affection towards her mother--and her father. She shares a bit about their lives together in order to provide context. Each chapter is a meditation about the nature of the changing relationship, which she

grounds in specific events and conversations. The book shows that those with dementia and their caregivers can find positive moments together despite the real challenges of dementia. I've read a number of books on caregiving, and this one stands out because of the extraordinary character displayed by the author. I like this book so well that I have two copies: one to share, and one that stays with me.

If you read "Love in the Land of Dementia: Finding Hope in the Caregiver's Journey" you will never forget it. I teared up on the fifth page of Deborah Shouse's loving chronicle of her mother's Alzheimer's Disease, its effects on her mother, Fran, on herself and her family. I was touched and inspired by the story, one that we all need to understand with the increase in the aging population. The story starts at her parents' home and continues later in a residential Alzheimer's unit. Divided into two parts, before and after, the seven-chapter book has 188 pages. It begins with "Confusion: The Early Stages," and progresses to "Celebrating Who She Was," which occurs eight years later. The book's loving description, never depressing however sad, journals the changes in her mother, her mother's medical care, the changing relationship Shouse has with her mother and her father's devotion. "Love in the Land of Dementia" is beautifully written. Shouse was profoundly saddened to witness the gradual deterioration of her mother's mind and the loss of her former personality and character traits. She was kind and steadfast, however, and found new ways to interact with her mother as the disease progressed. She created charming antics to get her mother's attention when Fran, in the middle stages of dementia, would stare off into the distance. It is a relief to read later how Shouse can celebrate the small moments of connection she and her mother share. She and her father celebrate these moments; father and daughter grow closer as a result. With all its pathos, this book is even humorous in a touching way. Paul, very late in the disease process, cooks up a scheme to have Fran meet Tom Cruise, a star she once was excited about almost meeting. His theory was that if she met Cruise, she would begin to recognize people again • even though she no longer acknowledges her husband or Deborah. The last chapter, "Taking Care of Yourself: A Caregiver's Guide," suggests ways of self-care, one of which is the Hero Project, a creation that Shouse and her partner, Ron Zoglin, developed "to

help people with dementia stay connected with their families and friends. A combination of storytelling and scrapbooking techniques, it is a family or group project which honors the person with Alzheimer's. Step-by-step instructions are listed. Deborah and Ron AfAçA "OK, I just feel like I can use their first names now, thatAfAçA "s how personal the book is AfAçA " have become international speaker/performers who educate about Alzheimer's. This feat exemplifies the transformational journey Deborah made as a daughter and caregiver lovingly living in the land of dementia with her mother. I received a free copy of the book. See my full review at kcnursingnews.com.

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