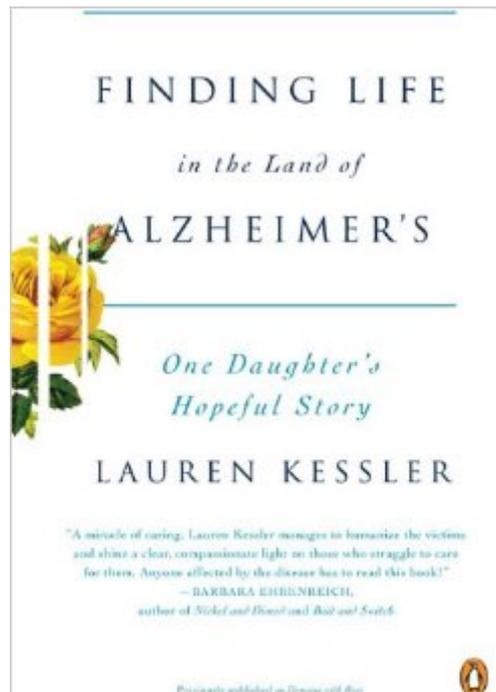


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Finding Life In The Land Of Alzheimer's: One Daughter's Hopeful Story



Synopsis

Previously published in Hardcover as *Dancing With Rose* One journalist's riveting and surprisingly hopeful in-the-trenches view of Alzheimer's. Nearly five million people in the United States are living with Alzheimer's. Like many children of Alzheimer's sufferers, Lauren Kessler, an accomplished journalist, was devastated by the disease that seemed to erase her mother's identity even before claiming her life. But suppose people with Alzheimer's are not slates wiped blank. Suppose they experience friendship and loss, romance and jealousy, joy and sorrow? To better understand this debilitating condition, Kessler enlists as a bottom-of-the-rung caregiver at an Alzheimer's facility and learns lessons that challenge what we think we know about the disease. A compelling, clear-eyed, and emotionally resonant narrative, *Finding Life in the Land of Alzheimer's* offers a new optimistic look at what the disease can teach us and a much-needed tonic for those faced with providing care for someone they love.

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Customer Reviews

"I don't remember what we did, ... but that doesn't matter. It was sure fun while it was happening," observes Vivian, when asked about her day. What could be a more perfect philosophy? Vivian resides in "Maplewood" (pseudonym), the Alzheimer's care facility in Oregon where Lauren Kessler worked as a resident assistant while researching her recently released book, *Dancing with Rose*. The book not only reflects the anger, repulsion, fear, and guilt I experienced during the three years my Alzheimer's-stricken mother spent dying in a nursing home, it addresses those feelings without

sentimentality and with close observation of the individuals (and we do see the residents as individuals) under Ms Kessler's care. In the process, my perceptions of the disease, the people who care for these patients, and the nature of an Alzheimer's existence radically changed, quite a feat in only 257 pages. I have always respected the aids in these "homes." I know I don't have the physical and emotional strength to take care of all the physical needs of even one, let alone a dozen, Alzheimer's patients as they do day-in-day-out for minimum wage under austere, if not hostile, working conditions. It is outrageous how little they earn or are appreciated and amazing that they persist in providing such devoted care. My new respect is for the patients themselves and the redefined lives they carve out for themselves at each stage of their illness, finding joy in the small pleasures of the moment - the feel of warm flannel or a stuffed animal, the comfort of hugging or holding hands, the taste of ice cream. Despite the straightforward writing, I often cried as I read. By the end, I agreed with Ms Kessler that there is joy and dignity in even these radically altered lives and that we can all benefit from assuming a similarly Zen approach to living. And as she points out, there are worse fates, more painful endings.

I am in the midst of caring for my father who is in the early stages of dementia. I watched his mother, my grandmother, suffer with Alzheimer's for almost ten years before she passed away fifteen years ago. Ms. Kessler's book strikes perfect chords of truth time after time. It is almost odd to say I enjoyed traveling her journey with her, but I guess what is more accurate is that she was an outstanding guide and reporter in a world that is so familiar to me and others who have been touched by this experience. Her thoughtful honesty with both her patient's lives as well as her own made this memoir one of the best I've ever read. A wonderful book that I recommend highly to anyone.

No exaggeration, "Dancing With Rose" will change the way you think about aging and death, the human mind and the nature of personhood. It is Kessler's most personal and, I think, best work. And considering her other books -- "Stubborn Twig," "The Happy Bottom Riding Club," "Clever Girl" et. al. -- that's a significant statement. Kessler's art for seeing people, and herself, clearly, without sentiment or melodrama, is rare, and one she shares with Joan Didion and tragically few others. A book about this subject could easily wade into platitudes, false uplift, or sob-sisterism. Kessler not only avoids all of that, but unveils a world that most of us are terrified to confront. Because she sees Alzheimer's clearly, because she is not afraid to think and write about aging and death, because she sees what is present in an Alzheimer's patient instead of what is absent, she allows us to see it,

too, without fear. It is a book about Alzheimer's yes, but it is really a book about life, in all of its stages, and about the relationships that shape and guide us. It's about mothers and daughters, parents and children, the ones we are given and the ones we choose. If you know anyone with Alzheimer's it is, of course, a must-read, but "Dancing With Rose" is much more expansive than the disease, and a dazzling work of non-fiction from a master of the art. Buy it. Read it. You won't regret a single moment spent with this author, in this world. In fact, you may find yourself lingering, un-eager to leave.

The author is a sharply perceptive journalist who brings back from her work at a care facility the kind of wisdom, playfulness and compassionate understanding we look for in a smart friend. Her journey is our journey, as children of aging parents and as partners dealing with our loved ones' illnesses or disabilities. This is a true story that, in Lauren Kessler's deeply honest style, transforms the way we see aging and illness. Dancing with Rose, with its graceful and accessible language, provides the reader with a down-to-earth look at life with Alzheimer's, not only as a medical condition to be coped with, but also as a life lesson that many of us and our loved ones will experience. This book is a treasure that should be shared with everyone we care about.

It is only an eroding sense of discipline that quells my impulse to gush to the author: thank you, thank you, thank you... Two years ago I rented out my house in Los Angeles to live with and care for my parents (both 87 years old this year) in Central Calif. Visiting Oregon last week I found this book, was unable to separate myself from it and wished that on my way back to California I could drop by Eugene to meet Lauren Kessler. The positive impact of this book is enormous. My view of my Mother and dementia is being changed and in the process I am gaining courage and inspiration. The story has deeply moved me. When I first started reading the book I found it difficult to breathe. As the story developed and the people came to life I found myself also caring about them, found myself weeping and laughing. But, importantly, able to breathe and learn.

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