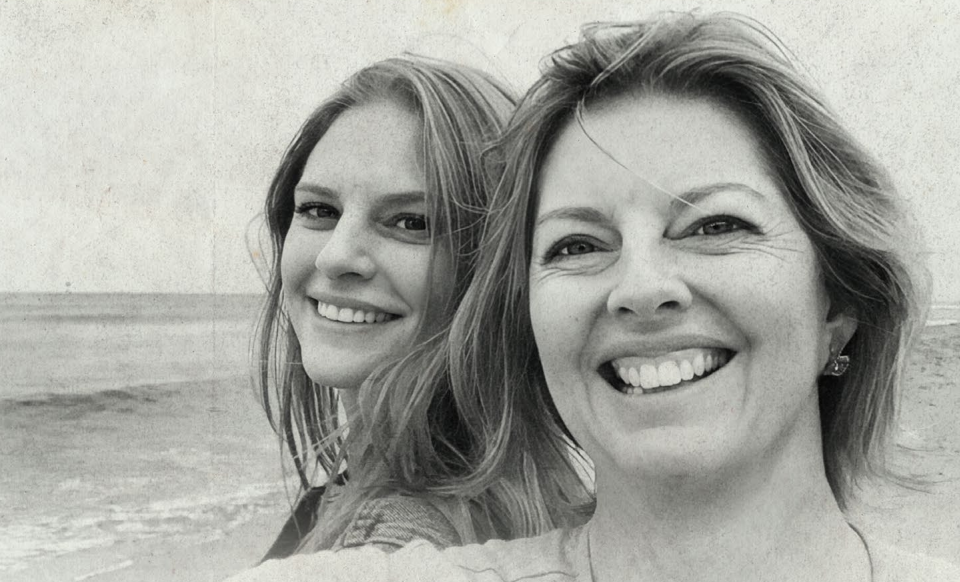


“A profound and powerful look into the human condition.”

—DAVID BROOKS, AUTHOR OF *THE SECOND MOUNTAIN*

Dispatches *from* Grief

A MOTHER'S JOURNEY
THROUGH THE UNTHINKABLE



Danielle Crittenden

Praise for *Dispatches from Grief*

Dispatches from Grief moves with the power of a freight train over rough terrain. Danielle Crittenden makes us eyewitnesses to the hour-by-hour crawl through grief. What I will remember forever is the transformation of the griever; the steady, unpredictable process of ripping and restitching; and the resilient enormity of a mother's love... Crittenden has been through hell, but has not emerged with empty hands.

—**DAVID BROOKS**, *NEW YORK TIMES* COLUMNIST AND BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE SECOND MOUNTAIN*

Danielle Crittenden has written the book on losing a child—vivid, honest, and utterly without pretense. A companion for those who grieve, and a guide for those who want to help them.

—**MOLLY JONG-FAST**, *NEW YORK TIMES* CONTRIBUTOR AND AUTHOR OF *HOW TO LOSE YOUR MOTHER*

Danielle Crittenden's writing is spare without being stark, her story desperate without being humorless, her attitude open-hearted without being banal. She captures kaleidoscopically what was remarkable about her daughter Miranda, weaving in the exquisite and often joyous

dynamics of her family. Writing this book was an act of strength...Her words ring with truth, love, clarity, and courage.

—**ANDREW SOLOMON**, NATIONAL BOOK AWARD—
WINNING AUTHOR OF *FAR FROM THE TREE* AND *THE NOONDAY DEMON*

Many of us move through our lives thinking we know what to expect, until a plot twist changes everything. Danielle Crittenden bravely takes us into this shattering: the sudden death of her daughter Miranda at thirty-two. *Dispatches from Grief* is about how we find our way into this new story, not by “moving on,” but by learning how to remain present when loss becomes permanent—and how honesty, rather than optimism, is what makes that endurance possible.

—**LORI GOTTLIEB**, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF *MAYBE YOU SHOULD TALK TO SOMEONE*

Having read many books about grief, I found Danielle Crittenden’s *Dispatches from Grief* to be something rare. After her daughter’s sudden death, she writes with raw emotion and uncommon literary skill that ultimately instructs us. We take the journey from devastation to transformation alongside her, learning—and feeling—every step of the way...What this beautiful book reminds us is that bonds

of love can continue forever, but in a new way. No closure required.

—**PAULINE BOSS**, PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA; AUTHOR OF *AMBIGUOUS LOSS* AND *THE MYTH OF CLOSURE*

This is a book about the worst thing that you can imagine: the death of a child. You can't prepare for it, you can't anticipate it; you can only try, afterwards, to make sense of it. Danielle Crittenden does this with grace and clarity, explaining how it is possible to go on living in an altered world. Grief is the price we pay for love, and so this is a book about love as well—how it endures, how it transforms, how it refuses to let go. Readers will find consolation, hope, and insight, as well as sadness and sorrow.

—**ANNE APPLEBAUM**, PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR OF *GULAG*, *TWILIGHT OF DEMOCRACY*, AND *AUTOCRACY, INC.*

A little masterpiece. I was pulled through in one voracious sitting, moved by every line. *Dispatches from Grief* joins the literary canon of great books about mourning and the search for solace.

—**TINA BROWN**, AUTHOR OF *THE VANITY FAIR DIARIES* AND *THE PALACE PAPERS*

Danielle Crittenden and David Frum endured the ultimate nightmare: losing a beloved, bursting-with-life daughter. Danielle's account is unsparing, vivid, and harrowing, a mother's howl of pain that, in the final pages, mercifully reaches a kind of diminuendo and becomes a canticle of maternal love.

—**CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY**, AUTHOR OF *THANK YOU FOR SMOKING* AND *THE JUDGE HUNTER*

Stunning, beautiful, and true on every page, *Dispatches from Grief* takes us on a journey through the unimaginable heartbreak of a parent and a family. Nothing is sugarcoated; nothing is wished or reasoned away. And yet, what emerges is a portal into the most enduring realities of our lives—that all we really have is each other, that family is everything, and that memories sustain us. The most moving and important book I've read in years.

—**ROBERT KURSON**, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SHADOW DIVERS* AND *ROCKET MEN*

Danielle Crittenden does something grief writers rarely do. She tells the truth. All of it. As a fellow exile in the land of grief, I found tears falling—then laughing out loud at a phrase—then that deep, coarse crying only griever's know. It was a good cry: my grief bowing to hers. Danielle has given us the gift of knowing her daughter Miranda. And

then she gives us something more: how, when she was ready, she began to make Miranda's life more important than her death. Not healed. Something other. Something that inspires rather than deadens. I am grateful to Danielle and Miranda. I am grateful for this book.

—**JAN WARNER**, AUTHOR OF *GRIEF DAY BY DAY* AND FOUNDER OF GRIEF SPEAKS OUT

The author's pain is unvarnished—Crittenden writes about her state of shock with scant yet emotive prose...A moving and intimate expression of pain.

—**KIRKUS REVIEWS**

This beautiful book is, above all, a love story. Danielle Crittenden's undying love for her daughter lights the way through the labyrinth of grief, making it possible for the rest of us to follow her down the dark and winding paths. It's here that we come to meet a beautiful, brilliant girl named Miranda, whose memory her mother shepherds—capturing her wit and kindness and glamour, mixing touches of gentle humor with fathomless sorrow. A luminous and highly original memoir, *Dispatches from Grief* is also a final act of mothering.

—**ABIGAIL TUCKER**, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE LION IN THE LIVING ROOM* AND *MOM GENES*

DISPATCHES FROM GRIEF

Dispatches *from* Grief

A MOTHER'S JOURNEY
THROUGH THE UNTHINKABLE

Danielle
Crittenden



INFINITE
BOOKS

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This memoir is based on the author's recollections of real events. Every effort has been made to portray them truthfully, though some names, identifying characteristics, and details have been altered to protect the privacy of those involved.

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For Miranda
and my fellow exiles in the Land of Grief

*I hope death is like
being carried to your bedroom
when you were a child
& fell asleep on the couch
during a family party.
I hope you can hear the laughter
from the next room.*

—ANONYMOUS

I

I thought I knew grief. My husband, David, and I lost parents who were still in their fifties: my father, Max, to the slow ravages of multiple sclerosis; David's mother, Barbara, to leukemia. Those deaths were at once expected and not expected—foreseen in their medical certainty, yet sudden in their arrival.

My father's weakened immune system sent him cycling in and out of the hospital with regularity. One day, he went in and didn't come out.

I was traveling on the day a nurse discovered him in his bed that morning, dead. It hadn't occurred to me that he would depart without warning, without a chance to say goodbye—and totally by himself.

David's mother died alone in the hospital as well, about an hour after her husband Murray went home to sleep. For eighteen years, Barbara had endured her illness with quiet grace, never knowing if any given summer would be her last.

When she entered the hospital for the first time on a February evening in 1992, her doctors radiated confidence. They spoke of treatment options like ascending stairs: If one level failed, we'd simply climb to the next. Barbara knew better, but we clung to the doctor's optimism over the patient's pessimism.

At that time, David and I lived in Manhattan with our firstborn, Miranda, then eight months old. Over the next three weeks, we shuttled back and forth between New York and Toronto to visit Barbara in the oncology ward. Baby Miranda napped in the sheeted cradle of her grandmother's legs.

Then a phone call, around 2 a.m. Barbara was gone.

Barbara's death tore open a sucking black hole, not only in the lives of her relatives, but in the homes of millions of television viewers in Canada, where she was a beloved broadcaster. Barbara Frum was that rare television presence who felt like family to strangers.

But if Canada lost a voice, we lost everything else: the woman who had left her imprint on every room of the family's home, on every plant in the vast woodland garden she'd conjured from suburban lawn. The dining table where Barbara had presided over countless fascinating conversations now seated relatives discussing "arrangements."

A tall candle embossed with the Star of David burned steadily on the kitchen island where I'd helped Barbara prepare meals. This was my first exposure to Jewish rituals of mourning, and I didn't know what to do. So I dandled and distracted baby Miranda, utterly bereft that this extraordinary grandmother would never know her first grandchild—and vice versa.

I mourned Barbara more than I'd ever mourned anyone in my own family. Each dawn brought fresh pain. I became a keeper of time—counting days, then weeks, then months since I'd last seen her. In quiet moments, I'd summon her memory and ask her advice on everything from colic to career. I tried to imagine what she would say in return. I never wanted to forget her voice.

Eventually, David and I had two more children: a son, Nathaniel, and another daughter, Beatrice. We kept Barbara's memory alive for our growing family—not as a saint, but as a person. Deifying the dead is another way of losing them.

So we gave our children their grandmother whole: her brilliance and her intimidating presence, her generosity and the cost of her extraordinary career. “That’s just what your Bubby Barbara would have done,” we’d say, “Did I ever tell you about the time...”



Twenty years passed before intimate grief hit us again. In the space of two weeks during the spring of 2013, we lost both my stepfather, Peter Worthington, and David's father, Murray Frum.

They were robust men in their mid-eighties, seemingly indestructible. Then, out of the blue, Murray was diagnosed with rampant cancer. It riddled his lungs and had already spread to his brain. Meanwhile, Pete's cardiologist delivered her own verdict: The chest infection that had lingered for weeks would not yield without life support. By the end of May, both were dead.

Again, expected and unexpected. Yet in Pete's case, I would learn something new about grief.

My relationship with my biological father was complicated. It was from Pete I learned how to live, how to be. He was adventurous, curious, courageous, generous, cheerful, and, above all, fun. He taught me the essentials of childhood: to swim, to catch a ball, to make mischief, to take risks.

Pete's father, "Fighting Frank" Worthington, helped forge the Canadian Army's identity in the

First World War, founded its armored corps between the wars, and commanded divisions in the Second. Pete, too young for that war and too proud to trade on his father's army legacy, lied his way into the Canadian Navy at sixteen.

Peace arrived before he saw action. When Korea erupted, Pete seized his chance: This time he joined the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (known as the "Princess Pats"). He commanded ground troops before being transferred to flying intelligence missions in tiny planes, slow and low, calling in airstrikes on enemy positions.

After Korea, he nearly joined the French Foreign Legion before the *Toronto Telegram* made a better offer. As a war correspondent, he chased danger from Congo to Algeria to Saigon. He stood three feet from Jack Ruby when Ruby shot JFK's assassin Lee Harvey Oswald—you can see Pete in the famous photograph, notebook in hand.

When the *Telegram* folded in 1971, Pete built the *Toronto Sun* from nothing. He broke stories, wrote

daily editorials, and charmed readers with personal columns, especially with his gift for transforming even catastrophe into comedy.

I grew up in that newsroom, spending every spare moment there. Pete would clear a desk, assign me “stories,” teach me to write grabby tabloid headlines. My first byline appeared around the age of nine over a review of a children’s book. Throughout middle and high school, I worked every weekend at jobs that no longer exist: answering city desk phones, monitoring police radios, operating the main switchboard. The moment I graduated, I became a full-time reporter. Why go to college when I’d found my calling?

Our children would love Pete with the same fierce devotion and looked forward to visiting his newsroom just as I once had. He kept stale candy in a desk drawer and let them scribble in reporter’s notebooks.



When Pete's doctor delivered the news about his chest infection, Pete met the diagnosis with characteristic calm, as if being told the next season of a television series he was enjoying had been canceled. He spent his final days consoling everyone else, reversing the natural order of comfort.

Pete lived another two weeks. On his last conscious day, we entered his hospital room one by one. For each of us, he had prepared a farewell message. Perhaps his sweetest was to Miranda, then twenty-one.

During two rocky years of her adolescence, Miranda had lived with my parents and attended high school in Toronto. Pete, who'd dealt with his share of insubordinate soldiers, recognized something familiar in his granddaughter's defiance. Where others saw rebellion, he saw spirit worth redirecting.

When Miranda stumbled home past curfew or flunked a test, he'd simply arch an eyebrow and deliver a perfectly timed quip that somehow left her sheepish rather than defensive. He never pulled rank, just waited her out with the patience of a man who'd

seen worse. Under his and my mother Yvonne's steady care, Miranda found her way through high school.

When Miranda entered Pete's hospital room, braced for sadness, Pete greeted her by grinning and gesturing toward the floor: "I'll see you DOWN THERE." She laughed as only he could make her laugh—caught off guard, delighted by him despite everything. Then he motioned her close. "I couldn't have loved you more than I did," he said simply, holding her.



Just as Pete taught me how to live, he taught me how to die. The idea of a "good death" had always struck me as a contradiction in terms: How could death ever be "good"? Pete resolved the paradox with typical directness: Given the choice between mechanical deterioration and merciful release, he'd take his leave, thanks.

Pete's body had already declined to a point he could not abide. Always effortlessly athletic, he'd been

having trouble walking. He suffered from constant physical pain, which he was loath to acknowledge. Sitting beside his hospital bed at one point, Pete said to me in his cheerful, philosophic way, “There’s nothing left I want to do. Just things I want to know.”

In choosing his swift exit, Pete gave us his parting gift: permission to let him go. In the years since, we’ve worn our Pete memories smooth with retelling. “Pete would be proud” became our family’s highest form of praise. Even now, a decade later, he remains luminous in our minds—absent only in flesh. This was grief at its very best.

We had no idea that fate had in store for us grief at its very worst.

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades

—MARY OLIVER, “WHEN DEATH COMES”

End of Preview

Keep reading.

Thank you for reading this sample of
Dispatches from Grief by Danielle Crittenden.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Danielle Crittenden is a journalist, author, and former host of the podcast *The Femsplainers*, known for her incisive and original commentary on women, family, and modern life. In addition to writing a popular monthly newsletter on Substack, her work has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and more. She is the author of four previous books, including *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman*, praised by *Vanity Fair* as the work of “one of the most important new thinkers about women and family.” Born in Toronto, she now lives in Washington, D.C., and Wellington, Ontario, with her husband, journalist David Frum.

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From the acclaimed author of *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us*, a luminous memoir reminding us that time with those we love is more precious—and precarious—than we imagine.

On a February morning, Danielle Crittenden received the call no parent can prepare for: Her thirty-two-year-old daughter Miranda had been found dead in her Brooklyn apartment.

In *Dispatches from Grief*, Crittenden chronicles the shattering impact of a child's death and the strange afterlife of grief—how it reshapes friendships, routines, and the self. With honesty, grace, and dark humor, she captures grief in its terrible specificity and love in its most distilled form. A memoir of heartbreaking beauty, *Dispatches from Grief* is both a portrait of devastation and a testament to human endurance and love.

DANIELLE CRITTENDEN is a journalist and author known for her incisive and original commentary on women, family, and modern life. Born in Toronto, she lives in Washington, D.C. and Wellington, Ontario with her husband, journalist David Frum.

