



Being with Rachel: A Personal Story of Memory and Survival

Karen Brennan

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Two courageous spirits, mother and daughter, challenged by a new reality after a life-changing accident.

The call came at 6 A.M. Karen Brennan's twenty-five-year-old daughter, Rachel, had been in a motorcycle accident. She was in a coma. Her CAT scan, the neurosurgeon said, was very, very ugly. Instantly, Karen Brennan's life of comfortable dailiness becomes "passionate necessary-ness." Cautioned that her daughter will not be the "same person," Brennan waits and hopes through weeks of intensive care, months of coma, and Rachel's determined efforts to walk again. The joy of Rachel's first words is followed by the discovery that she has a severe short-term memory deficit. Rachel cannot remember or fashion a simple narrative. A professor with a special interest in memory, Brennan takes up the challenge of helping Rachel rebuild herself. Jump-starting her daughter's memory by constantly retelling Rachel's own story, Brennan also fosters the creativity and humor that have always characterized her daughter. Their collaborative effort, bound by love, is a dynamic memoir of recovery and reinvention. Brennan says, "Why am I writing this story? I ask myself. I am writing to discover the situation in which my daughter and I find ourselves. I am writing as a way of grieving, because writing is the only way I know how to work out my loss. And I think if I can construct the story of Rachel's recovery, it might deliver me once and for all to hopefulness." "*Being with Rachel* is for readers who want to be reminded of why books matter. Karen Brennan's memoir advocates, illustrates, demonstrates the superhuman power of family, its ability to triumph in the face of worst-case scenarios, institutional aloofness, bad luck, and the evil influence of conventional wisdom. The family that emerges here is one built on a great deal of passionate, difficult love. This is a tough and inspiring and heartbreaking book."—Antonya Nelson "Spare, understated, emotionally honest and yet unsentimental, this beautifully crafted memoir succeeds on two levels: both as an extraordinarily moving personal document and as a vital investigation into the nature of memory and narrative."—Andrea Barrett

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Marilyn Chambers:

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