

THE GIRL IN THE RED BOOTS: MAKING PEACE WITH MY MOTHER

A Reader's Guide: Reflections and Questions

PROLOGUE

The author tells us “Stories are great teachers; they have the power to heal...These tales may help you untangle your stuck places and develop compassion for yourself and, possibly, for your mother.”

**Every relationship can be improved. Are there any stuck places in your relationship with your mother you are eager to explore and improve?

PART ONE

The author reminds us it is easy to “blame, demonize or idealize” our mothers.

** Are there ways now, or in the past you blame, demonize or idealize your mother? Or anyone else?

The author reminds us that the stories we carry—about ourselves and others—shape us. She recalls her mother’s joy at telling the red boots story.

**Did this awaken any stories your mother told about you growing up? How are you characterized in your mother’s repetitive story? What do these stories say about her? About you? Did the red boots story shed any light on your own experience as a parent or a child?

In “Mother Knows Best” the author is shocked to see herself repeat a one of her mother’s behaviors.

**Have you ever repeated a parents’ behaviors—in particular, one you don’t admire?

PART TWO

Three weeks after the author’s father dies, the author’s mother discloses a secret that unbalances her.

**Did anyone in your family ever disclose a secret that threw you? How did that experience shape you?

PART THREE

The author tells us about a formative experience: her “first day” on her first job as a therapist.

** Were any “first” days evoked for you?

After sharing her experience being bullied, the author concludes “self-disclosure breeds self-disclosure.”

**Think of a time you risked disclosing personal experiences? Why did you do it? What were the results?

PART FOUR

We are reminded that Freudian slips often reveal unconscious thoughts and feelings that may feel too dangerous to articulate. The author’s slip inspires her to review her decision to divorce her first husband.

**Have you ever made a Freudian slip that required soul-searching?

When the author is contemplating divorce, her mother gives her advice that infuriates her.

** How did Peggy’s advice impact you?

** Did you ever receive any advice that influenced an important decision?

PART FIVE

The author says, “Our mothers are our first teachers. Regardless of whether we imitate them or rebel against them, we internalize their essence, and it shapes us.”

*** Did any of the mother daughter relationships in this section remind you of your personal experience?

Elizabeth tried to protect her daughter from experiencing shame. Inadvertently she created a problem.

*** Do you recall feeling shame growing up? What happened? How did you deal with it?

“Mom, you are too much! Get a life,” Debra tells her helicopter mother, Sondra.

***Did you understand why Sondra became a helicopter mother? Is this story personally relevant to you?

Throughout the book, recognizing people are often unable to put their feelings into words, the author recommends tap into the wisdom on the body. For example, she tells Andrea, “Stay with your shoulder blade a moment. Sense it. Hug it. What’s it like to be with your shoulder blade? **

***Did you check in with your body while reading? If so, did you learn anything new?

PART SIX

The author brings her conflicted feelings and her mother to the Sally Jessy show.

***Have you ever invited your mother—or someone you love—to accompany you to an important event only to later regret offering the invitation?

The Adam and Eve story teaches us that going into one’s pain eases grief. Many people, like the author’s mother, avoid going into pain and instead, “carry on.”

** Do you generally prefer to “carry on” or is going into pain? What is your default?

PART SEVEN

When sitting by her dying mother’s bedside, the author wrote, “The enthusiasm I had to muster in my attempt to relate to my unreachable mother evoked a lifelong ache, my yearning to connect deeply.”

** Can you recall ever yearning to connect to someone unreachable...

PART EIGHT

The author presents two portraits of her mother, one in the beginning and one in the end of the book that show the arc of her transformation:

Judy, Daughter of Peggy, Captain of the Cheerleaders, Always Smiling

Judy, Daughter of Peggy: My Mother Graduated from Fordham at Sixty-Three

***Have you ever transformed your relationship with someone living or dead?

The author says, “Grief has been my teacher, helping me understand, accept and make peace with the fragility of life, the complexity of love, and the imperfections inherent in all relationship, especially mothering.

**What do you think the author grieves? Has grief ever been your teacher?