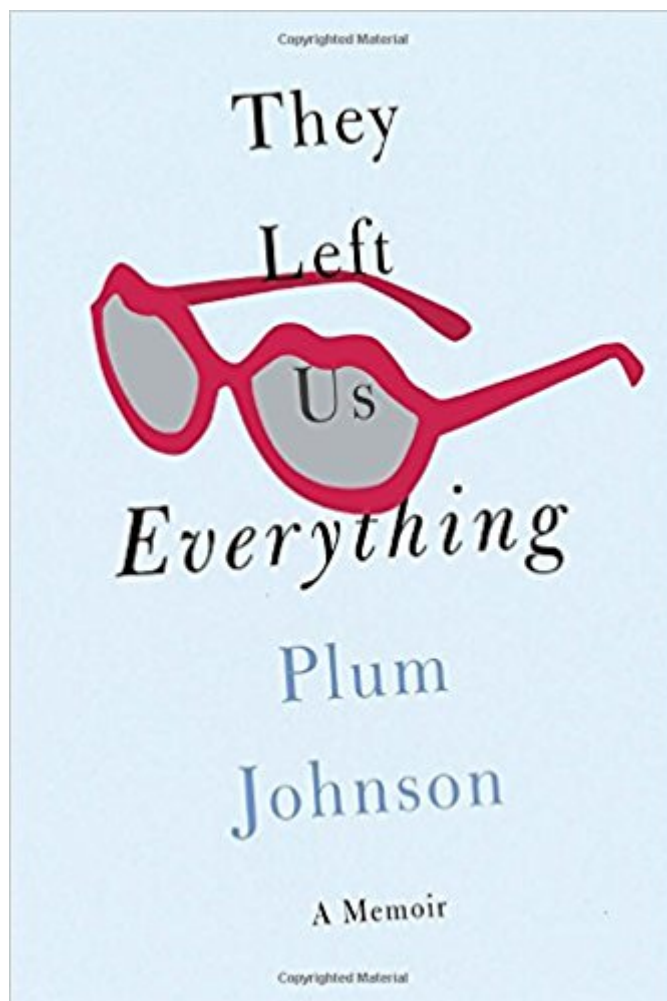


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# They Left Us Everything: A Memoir



## Synopsis

A warm, heartfelt memoir of family, loss, and a house jam-packed with decades of goods and memories. After almost twenty years of caring for elderly parents—first for their senile father, and then for their cantankerous ninety-three-year old mother—author Plum Johnson and her three younger brothers have finally fallen to their middle-aged knees with conflicted feelings of grief and relief. Now they must empty and sell the beloved family home, twenty-three rooms bulging with history, antiques, and oxygen tanks. Plum thought: How tough will that be? I know how to buy garbage bags. But the task turns out to be much harder and more rewarding than she ever imagined. Items from childhood trigger difficult memories of her eccentric family growing up in the 1950s and 60s, but unearthing new facts about her parents helps her reconcile those relationships, with a more accepting perspective about who they were and what they valued. *They Left Us Everything* is a funny, touching memoir about the importance of preserving family history to make sense of the past, and nurturing family bonds to safeguard the future.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: G.P. Putnam's Sons (July 26, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0399184090

ISBN-13: 978-0399184093

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 1 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 69 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #128,782 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #65 in [Books > Parenting & Relationships > Aging Parents](#) #262 in [Books > Self-Help > Death & Grief > Grief & Bereavement](#) #725 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors](#)

## Customer Reviews

Praise for *They Left Us Everything* —“Anyone who has grieved at the death of an aging parent after months of being a dedicated caregiver will relate to this poignant memoir written from the heart. . . . It's a candid, honest look at a relevant topic.” —*The Columbus Dispatch*  
—“*They Left Us Everything* will give you goosebumps.” —*It's the rare baby boomer [who] won't see herself inside Johnson's story. . . . This book will touch a nerve like no other, especially if you're a boomer with an elderly parent in need of care. Bring*

tissues, and bring your heart. They Left Us Everything is a jewel. [•Courier & Press](#) “Generous and heartfelt, Johnson’s book offers an intimate look at family and especially mother-daughter connections. It is an uplifting affirmation of human relationships and the cycle of life itself. A warmly candid memoir of navigating family, aging, and death. [•Kirkus Reviews](#) “[They Left Us Everything] is the kind of slim, unassuming memoir that hits you deep in the gut . . . Amid the scraps of paper left in jacket pockets, family photos and pieces of furniture, part of the “everything” our parents leave us with are our memories of them, good and bad. Perhaps figuring out what to do with them is as close to a manual for grief as we get. [•National Post](#) “Johnson writes with clarity, wit and a powerful descriptive voice that makes the rambling family home she moves back into for 16 weeks a character in itself. [•NOW Toronto](#) “A fascinating and delightful story œ a satisfying and thought-provoking book. [•The Parry Sound North Star](#) “Each word of They Left Us Everything is heartfelt and moving. We are privy to Johnson’s emotional journey to the point that it feels like she is part of our own family. Her story lingers inside, touching the soul. [•newz4u.net](#) “At times heartbreaking and at others hysterically funny . . . the book’s descriptive prose brings [the] places and people to life and poignantly conveys the quasi-spiritual journey that helps Johnson overcome her grief. [•Publishers Weekly](#) “[Johnson] takes you along on a journey that is emotional, humorous, and candid. [•Newstalk 1010](#)

Plum Johnson is an award-winning writer who lives in Toronto. She had an American mother and an English father whose compromise was to raise their children as Canadians. Growing up on the shores of Lake Ontario, they made annual pilgrimages by car down Route 15 to Richmond, Virginia, stopping to read every historical marker along the way. They Left Us Everything was longlisted for the Leacock Medal for Humour, shortlisted for the Kobo Emerging Writer Prize, and was the winner of the RBC Taylor Prize for nonfiction.

It feels so right to read a memoir. This one, Plum Johnson’s *THEY LEFT US EVERYTHING*, came at the right time, like most of them seem to do. The author talks about her large family, her aging parents, her stern yet interesting father who has passed away several years ago, and her oh so charismatic and strong mother who is the ripe age of 93, whom she cares for as she is holding on to life. Johnson and her siblings, all brothers, are a close-knit family, and a fascinating one at that, they hail from Canada, and grew up in a mansion on a lake, where their

mother still resides. This house is not just any house. It has a history, to this family and beyond. When it comes time to go through the belongings left to the children, it is no easy task. The memories and artifacts left behind have a past all of their own. It brings up so much not only for Johnson but for her brothers, that it is hard to leave behind. Johnson is especially attached to the house, like a fixture that doesn't want to budge. She learns a great deal about both of her parents through letters that they unearth and as readers, we are treated to what becomes of our parents when they leave. What we learn about them that we wish we could have asked them when they were alive. I found this same sentiment in a memoir that I read just last week. Yet, what a gift to find. To cherish. What becomes of our past and who do our memories benefit? I not only enjoyed reading about the Point of View, as the house was lovingly called, but I adored Johnson's perspective in her memoir. She was able to let go of so much but at the same time, get so much.

Although Plum Johnson's family is more eccentric and well-travelled than mine, I identified with many of the issues she faced when dealing with the death of a parent, dispersal of an estate and, over time, coming to a more in-depth understanding of who her parents really were in light of what they experienced. I loved her humour, sarcasm, insight and siblings! I felt at home in her house on the lake because many of my relatives come from the same region of Canada. Thanks, Plum!

I enjoyed reading this book very much, I read it in 2 nights, my sleep suffered. Not only I loved the way the author writes( engagingly honest, and funny, maybe because of that honesty), but also because I could relate to her, as I had lost my parents one by one (not recently but the losses would feel raw to me forever). I wish I had a book like this when my parents were still alive.

Kind of a slow start to the book but the journey was worth the read. You got to see the complex story of a family that loved well and weathered many ups and downs along the way. You discover the different ways parents and children see each other in the everyday activities of their lives. What struck me was how the child as an adult begins to understand the nature of the person that was her parent. She begins to see and understand the difficult relationship that her parents had and the amazing lifestyle that they had throughout their marriage. As she learns you may begin to examine your own life and parental relationships and realizes how different we all see our own relationships. If you had to deal with the clearing of a parental home you can get a different insight into the difficulties that you may have felt sharing or dispersing of their belongings. It is a fine read.

Book was very slow in starting but once it started it was almost impossible to put down. The writing is superb, very descriptive, almost lyrical in places.

Although well written, I honestly couldn't get through all of the excruciating detail. I couldn't even finish it though I wanted to. Would not recommend.

Alex Lind was my godfather and so I have a personal interest in this story, but regardless of that connection, this delightful look back at lives lived honestly, complete with strife, joy and compassion, makes the struggle of Plum and her siblings to come to terms with the truth of who their parents were and who that in turn made each of them, both intimate and global. We all, sooner or later, must say goodbye to our parents and all they leave us, walk three times backward around their lives and move on.

Good book. I'm not so concerned about "leaving it all" to my children now if it should happen that way. A good read for those with elderly parents as well.

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