

About "The Buffet Letters"

Let me start by saying, my mother was an extraordinary, ordinary woman. I knew this as a child, but not fully until I found the letters.

Because of a personal tragedy I had suffered a few years before my grandmother died, I shocked my family by insisting on preparing her body for burial. Along with finding astonishing comfort from that profound task of love, I found deep in my grandmother's buffet a box of letters written by her daughter, my mother, during the first few months after Mother's elopement in 1948, at age 18.

Her daily documentation to her mother and little sister were filled with dreams and desperation, laced with wit and naivety, courage and hopelessness, strength and surrender. The rarity of the letters was that I saw my mother grow from a teen to a woman in four months. Some of those days warranted two or three letters inspired somewhat by tedium but mostly anguished homesickness. Yes, an incomparable gift but a double edged sword. I learned of my young parents' dreams, and saw them crushed by poverty. In a little over four months. Perhaps the saddest part personally was that as I read the last of those letters, I knew what came after. But as she wrote it, she still clung to hope.

I wanted to honor Mother's letters somehow, but tried and failed many times to find a suitable approach. Nevertheless, the courage and sheer determination they held had given me vital tools to keep moving forward as I grappled with my own tragedy and prolonged grief. It was my mother who ensured I survived it and even after her death many years later, she freed me from it. Being with her the last five days of her life was the catalyst that somehow gave me the sapience I needed to do what I did.

With the dark and light of the painfully honest letters alongside the wrenching story of my beloved's ending and the repeated self-sabotaging decisions I made, I hope to offer at least one person a small nugget of insight.