

## Book Review

***Becoming My Mother's Daughter: A Story of Survival and Renewal.*** Erika Gottlieb. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008; illustrations; x + 166 pages; ISBN 978-1-55458-030-9; \$24.95(paper).

Erika Gottlieb's memoir *Becoming My Mother's Daughter: A Story of Survival and Renewal*, is a mesmerizing narrative exploring survival and renewal of the mother-daughter relationship. She weaves together the lives of three generations of her Jewish Hungarian family, Ethel (her grandmother), Eliza (her mother) and Eva (a thinly disguised Gottlieb), as they struggle to survive during the last few months of the Nazi occupation of Budapest.

Eva narrates the story as she works her way through mementos saved by her mother, Eliza, in an old, tattered, handbag. The handbag is the bridge to the events of her life before and after World War II. During the war, while in hiding, the handbag contained treasures of physical survival: chocolate, bread, medicine, blankets, etc. When the family immigrated to Canada, the bag bridged the Old World with the New, by carrying the treasures of continuity: photos, drawings, letters and other mementos.

Resonance is the strength of this book. Eva's story is our story. The mother-daughter bond, as illustrated through Ethel and Eliza, and then Eliza and Eva, is universal. While the context of the relationship will vary, the intensity of the relationship, the emotions; frustration, helplessness, anger, caring, concern and love, remain consistent. Gottlieb lays bare the challenges that inherently exist between mothers and daughters, challenges that we continually struggle to resolve.

Throughout the book, Gottlieb intersperses her own artwork, from line sketches and drawings, to elaborate paintings, as she struggles to understand the relationship among her grandmother, mother and herself. Her artwork, as the visual manifestation of her struggle, assists us in understanding the overarching message of her memoir, "...embrace the past, make it part of the living. To live in the past, to let the past live in you. To accept and to welcome this transformation...I am my mother's daughter..." (164).

While reading this book, it is virtually impossible to not reflect upon your own mother-daughter relationships. What were/are our struggles? How does our past live in us? How will my mother's life experiences continue to shape my own? How will my life experiences shape my two daughter's lives as they make their way out into the world? When will we become our mother's daughters?

Dawne Clarke  
St. Thomas University