

## Allison's Book Corner

### March 2024

#### ***Dear Mom and Dad: A Letter About Family, Memory, and the America We Once Knew***

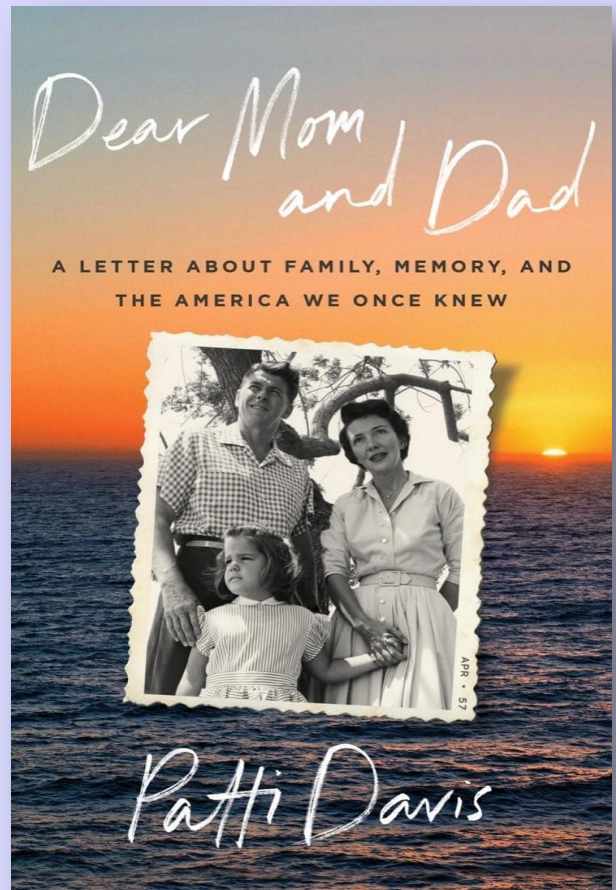
by Patti Davis  
(Liveright 2024)

*“Our parents reside within us. No matter how long they have been gone, or how much we have worked on processing those relationships, they occupy a good portion of our inner landscape.” - Patti Davis*

**This is not a political book review.** However, if you are of a certain age, you remember when Ronald Reagan was President of the United States. Those were my teenage years.

You may also remember that the Reagans' adult children were a bit controversial, and rebelled against the conservative views of their parents. For many years, their daughter Patti remained in the headlines as an adversary. Well, Patti is 70 years old now and has written a book in the form of a letter to both of her parents, Nancy Davis Reagan and Ronald Reagan. Patti regards both of them through a more mature and forgiving lens.

This memoir is beautifully written and painfully honest. When you are a child, your parents or guardians are your entire world. Your first life lessons come from them. Patti was no different until her father became Governor of California. Young Patti sensed that politics would make a huge difference in their relationship; unfortunately, it became a wedge between them. She came to understand that she was sharing Governor Reagan with the state of California. Six years after finishing his term as Governor, Reagan was elected President,



and then Patti had to share him with the entire world. That would have been difficult for any young person.

The natural inclination would be to lean on the other parent for emotional support. But Patti learns that when your other parent is Nancy Reagan, this is not an easy feat. In the Reagans' heyday, certain topics were simply not discussed. Although simple math certainly indicated that Nancy Reagan was already pregnant with Patti when she married Ronald Reagan, this was never really raised publicly. But in a conversation with her mother when she is a young adult, Patti learns that perhaps her father would not have married her mother had she not been pregnant. Patti firmly believes that this one fact may have set her and her mother up for a lifelong challenging relationship. Readers, I am a daughter, and I have a daughter. Mother-daughter relationships are very complex. I can attest to the truth of that.

This is not a sad memoir. This is a daughter reflecting upon her past with a certain level of empathy and forgiveness, but without whitewashing what happened. Ronald Reagan was a son of an alcoholic father. Nancy Reagan's mother abandoned her as a young girl with relatives in order to seek fame and fortune. How could these life circumstances not affect them both as parents?

It is troubling that Nancy Reagan seems to have had a hard time accepting Patti and showing love toward her. You may feel that this is Patti's opinion, and that we do not know her mother's side. But if you were alive during that time, you *witnessed* Nancy Reagan's side of things. Who can forget Nancy's adoring gaze, which shone brightly on one person and one person alone: her "Ronnie"? That gaze went both ways, and it allowed room for no one else, including their children. In her letter to her mother, Patti says, "That circle of just the two of you was the overriding reality of our family. It dominated everything."

There are some good memories shared in this book. Ronald Reagan shared his strong faith in God with his daughter. Patti had many heartwarming moments with her father and shares many in this book. She credits these moments, her father's memorable voice and his love as what prevented her committing suicide as a young woman. There were also good moments with her mother - few, and far between - but Patti tells us about them.

At its heart, what is revealed in this letter is a human story. All families are messy. Most of us are able to deal with this away from the spotlight, not on a national stage.

I am so grateful that Patti was able to overcome her childhood and has lived for 70 years. She has come full circle from the anger of her youth to a

woman at peace today. Don't we all want to say that in our senior years? My parents are in their seventies and acknowledge that every day they wake up is a gift. But if they do not wake up, each one is at peace. That is all we can truly ask for in this short life.