

Losing Mum and Pup



a memoir

Christopher Buckley

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In twelve months between 2007 and 2008, Christopher Buckley coped with the passing of his father, William F. Buckley, the father of the modern conservative movement, and his mother, Patricia Taylor Buckley, one of New York's most glamorous and colorful socialites. He was their only child and their relationship was close and complicated. Writes Buckley: "They were not - with respect to every other set of loving, wonderful parents in the world - your typical mom and dad."

As Buckley tells the story of their final year together, he takes readers on a surprisingly entertaining tour through hospitals, funeral homes, and memorial services, capturing the heartbreaking and disorienting feeling of becoming a 55-year-old orphan. Buckley maintains his sense of humor by recalling the words of Oscar Wilde: "To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune. To lose both looks like carelessness."

Just as Calvin Trillin and Joan Didion gave readers solace and insight into the experience of losing a spouse, Christopher Buckley offers consolation, wit, and warmth to those coping with the death of a parent, while telling a unique personal story of life with legends.

Losing Mum and Pup Details

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bookczuk says

I adore Christopher Buckley's writing. Have been a big fan for a while now, especially with his novels and pos-NR stuff. Had read excerpts of this book in various places, then my mom took a nosedive in her health and I forgot about reading the book. Enter my good friend Liz, my book-lending savior, with a copy of *Losing Mum and Pup*.

What a truly moving memoir. Humor, honesty and a helluva vocabulary (not to mention a fabulous writing skill and the ability to tell a story) made this one of my favorite books of the year. Reading this as my mother moved into the end stages of life was not sad -- more cathartic. Someone was walking with me, sharing the decline of a larger than life figure. For though my tiny mother is no William F Buckley, she is, indeed, larger than life. One only has to look at the hundreds and hundreds of messages that have come in for her since we let folks know she was moving toward the exit.

Javaczuk is reading the book, and ElderBrother has his eyes on it (though I'll probably get him his own copy, because he returns to India in a week and this copy goes back to Liz.)

Art says

Losing Mum and Pup: a memoir by Christopher Buckley. Some time last year, when I was speaking with my "pup" on the phone, he remarked, "I thought of you the other day when that guy you used to watch on tv died." It took me a couple of minutes to figure out who he was talking about. "That guy" was William F. Buckley, Jr. (WFB) I used to watch "Firing Line" when I was young (now my weekly political addiction is "The McLaughlin Group"). In this memoir, Christopher Buckley talks about the two year process of losing his mother (Patricia Buckley) and father (WFB). Patricia, a Canadian by birth, met WFB while attending Vassar (she roomed with one of his sisters). She later became a great New York socialite, playing the role of "Mrs. WFB." She was quite beautiful and threw spectacular parties. After his mother passed away, Christopher spent the next year taking care of his grieving and ailing father. From yachting to writing to talk of suicide, a lot of ground and memories are covered in this relatively short memoir. Christopher Buckley remembers his father as "a great man" who was always on the move and taking risks. A few years before his father's death, "pup" wanted to go on a short sailing trip (the wind was howling, a state of emergency had been declared, and "pup" takes his son and a couple of friends out on the sea in the middle of it all). Furious at the time, Christopher now says he'd give anything to go on one more sailing trip with his deceased "pup" (even if it was in the middle of a Nor'easter). The book is both poignant and funny. I'd recommend, especially to anyone who has lost a parent.

George says

STILL LARGER THAN LIFE.

"I looked at Mum and realized -- twang! -- that she was telling an untruth. A big untruth. And I remember thinking in that instant how thrilling and grown-up it must be to say something so completely untrue, as

opposed to the little amateur fibs I was already practiced at -- horrid little apprentice sinner that I was --like the ones about you'd already said your prayers or washed under the fingernails. Yes, I was impressed."

? Christopher Buckley, *Losing Mum and Pup*

The image of Christopher Hitchens wheeling his flight luggage into St. Patrick's Cathedral in NYC to attend the funeral of 'Conservative Lion,' William F. Buckley, Jr., in and of itself, would have made this audiobook worth its six hours of listening time. Fact really can be stranger than fiction.

Christopher Buckley, however, is one of the most entertaining and articulate writers ever (it must be in the genes), and his reminiscences in *LOSING MUM AND PUP* are rife with sterling and nostalgic imagery.

Recommendation: Especially for fans of the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s...

"Industry is the enemy of melancholy."—part 1

OverDrive MP3 Audiobook edition, 6 hours, 21 minutes

Mark says

What I've read of Christopher Buckley's fiction is funny and incisive, as he takes on the hypocrisies, corruption, foibles and follies of the American political universe (or should that be "biverse"?)—the lobbyists, lawyers, candidates, spin doctors, players, kingmakers, etc., etc. And he should know this world, since he's the son of William F. Buckley, conservative icon, author of over 50 books, creator and host for 30 years of "Firing Line" and founder of "National Review," both prominent defenders of the political right. What I hoped for in reading this memoir about, and eulogy to, his parents, the famous Bill and his socialite wife Pat Buckley, was perhaps a more Oedipal book about "Christo's" liberation from their tyranny—he did, after all, publicly betray his father's political convictions last year by coming out in support of Obama—but perhaps he couldn't write that book yet. As it is, I'm sure lots of republicans and Buckleyites will accuse the son of some sort of parricide. He tells enough stories that put Mum and Pup in a pretty unflattering light, though he's in almost every instance quick to apologize and remind us that Great People can be forgiven their arrogance, blindness, pomposity, selfishness. I'm willing to do that to some extent, I guess, though I'm less tolerant about Christo's namedropping—how many times do I really want to hear about good ol' Henry (i.e. Kissinger), whom Buckley jr. calls one of the most brilliant and eloquent men on earth, not to mention several presidents, kings and queens, artists, billionaires, actors, and so on and so forth. Is the book a paean to this host of who's who or an attempt to come to terms with his parents and their deaths? On the plus side, Buckley's book is nearly as funny as a book about the terminal illnesses and deaths of one's parents can be. Certainly much of what surrounds death should amuse us (I strongly recommend Evelyn Waugh's satire of the funeral industry, "The Loved One," which surely Christopher Buckley must have read once upon a time), even if death itself is not so funny.

Jocelyne Broderick says

I consider myself a very smart person, and this book was full of words even *I* didn't know! Sheesh! Talk about writing for the common folk. Seriously, if I Post-it flagged every word to look up, this would look like a freakin divorce decree with all the "sign-here"s. Also, this bonehead goes right into the story ASSUMING

we know who his "famous" parents are. He never says. What he does do though is list the famous people his parents hung around with. So what? He's all "I don't want to be a name dropper, but..." then proceeds to list about 100 names (some I recognized, some not).

So, I decided to not finish, and maybe I didn't even start. It's possible all of this was in the prologue or writer's note. I still don't know who his parents are, but I'm assuming his dad was some sort of political bigwig in personal contact (and the author too) with presidents. It seemed very pretentious of this guy to assume we know who they are. And maybe I'm just ignorant and should know? I have a feeling that even if I did know who they are, I still wouldn't want to read this.

Michael says

As I have said before, memoirs are hard to rate. For one, you try to be as honest as possible without sounding bias but then you try to remain realistic at the same time. Based on the contents of this book, I honestly thought this was less about his parents and more about what led to his parents demise. I simply did not care about anything else, it just seemed like filler thus me skipping the majority of this book. I did like the pictures, that was probably the only thing that I felt was memorable. The other parts were just not that exciting, it read like a bad movie script that no one would choose to produce a movie.

Oh well, I had high expectations reading it and was let down.

Another book that bites the dust!

Laura says

I was interested in what he had to say and in the discussion on handling a parent's death.[return][return]Christopher Buckley writes well and is very funny. And what a life and cast of characters to discuss. My parents were really nice people, but they weren't "great" people so I didn't live with the pressure of having an intellectual powerhouse or social phenomenon for a parent. Chris Buckley did, but I never felt like I couldn't relate to his life. He tells the stories so matter-of-factly that it feels more like sharing. The kind that leads you to think through your own parents' quirks and annoying or entertaining characteristics.[return][return]This is very much a book about dying or watching someone you love die. It is also about the regrets and frustrations that often accompany watching a parent die. And about dealing with the aftermath, the decisions, the condolences, and the follow-up.[return][return]I enjoyed the book very much. It entertained, it encouraged, and it caused me to revisit some of my grief over Dad's death last year.

Tim Lundquist says

Chris Buckley is a wonderful writer, and the vignettes he offers of his mother and father are as beautiful as they are revelatory. The Buckleys were not ideal parents; great men (and this includes women) rarely have time to be. And it is at times, remarkable, that CB would offer such personal details about his parents. Even WFB, Lion of the Right and one of the most notable Catholics on the planet, considered suicide in his last year of life. The sort of suffering he endured in his final months, after his wife died, makes even great men meek.

I'm sure those close to the family were equal parts concerned and engrossed when the book finally was released.

But aside from the personal details included here, there are many wonderful passages in the book. One such passage, almost a throwaway, and perhaps especially meaningful to me because of the recent addition to our family, went something like this: a man should strive to do three things before he can call his life complete: have a son, plant a tree, write a book.

I like that list.

Terra says

Losing Mum and Pup by Christopher Buckley is an unforgettable memoir that is endearing, enchanting and spoken from the heart. A story of dedication, love, honesty, irritable moments and just plain stubbornness. A serious story but with so many light moments that you can't help but chuckle out loud. Oh don't get me wrong as you will still need a hankie for the tear jerking renditions of what we deal with when a loved one dies, but that is more back story and the pleasant, jovial moments of life are what is portrayed as most important.

As I listened to Christopher Buckley read this I could not help myself with feeling my own pain of losing a parent and then recalling the wonderful memories that my dad and I not only made but shared as each of us aged.

At first I really wasn't sure that I would like this story but it didn't take long before it captured me, ensnaring me like a fish caught in a net. I just could not put it down and longed for the next CD as the one before was finishing up.

I could actually see so many ways in which WFB was so like my dad that I think it is the programming of an older generation which instills hard work, hunger for life and a certain stubbornness that seems to be lacking in our current generation. A need to put family first as much as possible doesn't seem to carry the weight of what it did with the children of the cold war era.

My opinion is that Christopher Buckley's reading of his parents story is a necessity, for who else could tell of the good, bad and hair raising moments of the life of the two people most important to him. The different tones of voice lending so much to each and every different memory that you can almost envision yourself being right there with them.

Bill says

Christopher Buckley's bittersweet memoir of his final year with his stylish mother and famously conservative father lends a human scale to a couple that so often appeared larger than life. Personally, I was never particularly enamoured of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s politics or even his books, despite being piqued by God and Man at Yale and amused on occasion by the capers of fictional CIA agent Blackford Oakes. However, from the time I was a small boy who loved big words, I was flattered to be compared favorably to the legendarily eloquent Buckley, for whom it was perfectly natural to toss off a word like "postprandial" when

one intended to take a stroll after a lunch. (Despite his legendary command of the English language, it was apparently his third language.) In addition, although no sailor myself, I have always had an outsized admiration for anyone who could captain or navigate a wind-borne vessel. Ironically, I have not read Buckley's celebrated sailing books, but I have admired his exploits on the water based on second-hand accounts. Finally, anyone who is able to make a good living through his pen earns a certain amount of admiration from me. As Samuel Johnson famously said, "No one but a blockhead would write except for money."

There are few more difficult ways to grow up than as the son of a famous father and a socialite mother. Winston Churchill is perhaps the most notable example, having admired from afar his imperious, syphilitic father and fashionable, flirtatious mother -- reportedly a consort of no less than the King of England. Christopher Buckley, similar in kind if not degree, seasons his admiration for his famous parents with a clear-eyed and painful acknowledgment of their many shortcomings public and private. Patricia Buckley, once one of New York's most celebrated hostesses, apparently frequently found it impossible to distinguish between truth and fiction on topics as diverse as her reasons for not finishing her college education at Vassar to visits from the Royal Family in her youth.

Christopher's Buckley's relationship with his mother was often stormy, but his complex blend of admiration and antagonism toward his father is the potent cocktail that really fuels this story and carries it to its poignant conclusion. Bill Buckley's Olympian detachment from quotidian concerns resulted in over 90 books, thousands of pages of articles, hundreds of television appearances, and friends and acquaintances among the most celebrated persons of the day. Coupled with Buckley's steadfast convictions, conservative views, and Catholic certitude, Buckley's sense of himself could be alternately entrancing and insufferable. And his personal recklessness in his boat and in his car whether his family was aboard or not bespeaks a level of self-absorption that contrasts sharply with moments of familial generosity. Ultimately, of course, laboring as an author in the shadow of your more famous father, subject to criticism alternately enthusiastic and capriciously cruel, is a cross no son should have to bear, even if it is assumed voluntarily.

Christopher Buckley, despite the traces of bitterness that lace this confection, writes with wit, grace, and self-awareness of his attempt to reconcile himself to the complex emotional inheritance bequeathed to him by his parents. In doing so, he seems ultimately to come to terms with the repeated betrayals inflicted on him by his prevaricating mother. The wounds left by a half century of fighting and making up with his father require a slower reconciliation, brought about in part by his father's slow physical decline and the constant devotion it evoked. To his credit, the senior Buckley, whose unfailing mental acumen carried him through the completion of biographies of Goldwater and Reagan even as he succumbed to kidney failure, diabetes, skin cancer, and general physical enfeeblement, was mostly good-humored and gracious toward his son as he approached his end. In the end, the younger Buckley's vocation as a humorist and the elder Buckley's personal civility and generosity shine through the tangled emotions of this real life soap opera featuring one of America's first families.

Judy says

"To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune. To lose both looks like carelessness." Oscar Wilde. Christopher Buckley lost both of his parents in the span of 12 months and became an orphan at the age of 55. In this memoir, Christopher tells the story of taking his mother off life support and tending to his father during the last year of his life while musing on stories of their past as a family. Some of the stories in the

book were priceless--such as turning down the offer from the White House to have Vice President Dick Cheney speak at William F. Buckley's memorial service at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. I'm sure that many of the revelations about his parents will, no doubt, get Christopher Buckley banned from many a dinner party, but his portrait of his parents is, at the root, warm and loving. The reader will be moved to both tears and laughter. A priceless combination.

Linda says

This book is skinny so it is a fast read. Plus, Christopher Buckley, the son of the aforementioned "Mum and Pup," is a good writer. Pup, is William F. Buckley, the ultra-conservative and Mum is, his wife, Pat Buckley, a socialite. Ultra-conservatives and socialites are not exactly the kind of people that I am crazy about but this memoir is the tale of parents, as they slip, not too quietly into old age and death. Also, it is a retrospective, of a sort, of what these difficult people were like in the full of their lives. Most of the "folks" (and I use this word ironically), who were friends with the Buckylys were famous and powerful -- in the church, politics, and literary circles. It is insightful to note how the aristocracy lives and spends money. The part I really liked was how Vice President Cheney was denied the privilege of speaking at WFB's funeral because there were already enough speakers. tee hee. Christopher Buckley does not take himself or his family too seriously, thank God, and the book is really quite funny. I would recommend it.

Carol Bakker says

So keen is Christopher Buckley's wit, that I couldn't help laughing ... even though the chuckles were often followed by sighs. The death of your parents isn't normally considered fodder for comedy; I suspect he finds mirth and irony in all of life.

William F. Buckley, Jr. came to my attention in my early twenties. One of my first conscientious self-improvement projects was to read his novels and columns in order to expand my vocabulary.

I was shocked to discover that English was WFB's **third** language, learned at age six in school in London. He often spoke Spanish at home and even in the hospital with Hispanic care-givers.

It's clear that there was fond affection between father and son. CTB calls his father a truly great man, the world's coolest mentor. Their area of conflict—the subject they eventually avoided— was that Christopher did not share his father's devout Catholic faith.

I wish Christo, as he was called, had been more careful to protect his parents' dignity. He admits up front that parts of his book would appall them. Well, it would appall me, too, to have my (diabetes related? lack of inhibition?) increasing eccentricity highlighted.

It's the oddest hobby, but I like funerals. I watched Christopher's and Henry Kissinger's eulogies on YouTube; they are transcribed in the book. The complete service is not available online, but, bless him, Christopher included the musical playlist; that will be my playlist in the days to come.

Before I was a third of the way through this book, I put three sailing memoirs of WFB on my nightstand. It's a delightful juxtaposition, reading the son's view in one book and the father's in another.

Years ago, he gave an interview to Playboy magazine. ... At the end of the interview, he was asked what he would like for an epitaph and he replied, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.' Only Pup could manage to work the Book of Job into a Hugh Hefner publication.

Nancy says

Christopher Buckley was the only son of the Messiah of Conservatism, William F. Buckley, and his wife, the style icon and socialite Pat Buckley. When he lost these two larger-than-life characters within a year of each other, he felt compelled to pen this short memoir of that painful year. I confess that I was no fan of either parent, but this memoir is actually quite lovely. Buckley writes of both of these difficult, complicated people with wry honesty, genuine affection, and a complete and (to me) amazing lack of bitterness of self-pity. Whatever else the Buckylys did wrong (and even by a loving son's report, they did plenty of appalling things), they raised a son who is both kind and fair, two of my very favorite traits to find in living creatures (Especially humans. Dogs tend to be better at both.).

Kudos to [junior:] Buckley for taking a surprisingly clear-sighted look at the challenges and rewards posed by living with people who have been dowered with enormous talent and charm...but sometimes not so much kindness or concern for others. Great Men (and Women) are often thoughtlessly cruel, but Buckley makes the reader see and understand that they can also be adored and cherished...and deeply missed when they shuffle off their earthly coil.

Negin says

This is a beautiful and heartwarming memoir of Christopher Buckley's parents – William F. Buckley and his wife Patricia. Before reading this, I knew very little about them other than the fact that William F. Buckley was a staunch conservative. Regardless of where one stands with his political viewpoints and all, this is a worthwhile and surprisingly entertaining read, despite the sad subject matter (losing one's parents). I would recommend it to all who have dealt or may soon be about to deal with losing one's parents.

Some of my favorite quotes:

William F. Buckley often told his son, "Industry is the enemy of melancholy."

"Perhaps, after all, the most beautiful words in the language are I'm sorry."

"A twenty-minute eulogy, unless composed by a) William Shakespeare, b) Winston Churchill, or c) Mark Twain, is sixteen minutes too long. Technical note: It is better to tell a eulogist to speak for four minutes not five minutes. 'Five minutes' to the modern ear sounds like 'around five minutes,' whereas 'four minutes' means 'four minutes.'"

"Once they're both gone, your parents' house instantly turns into a museum."
