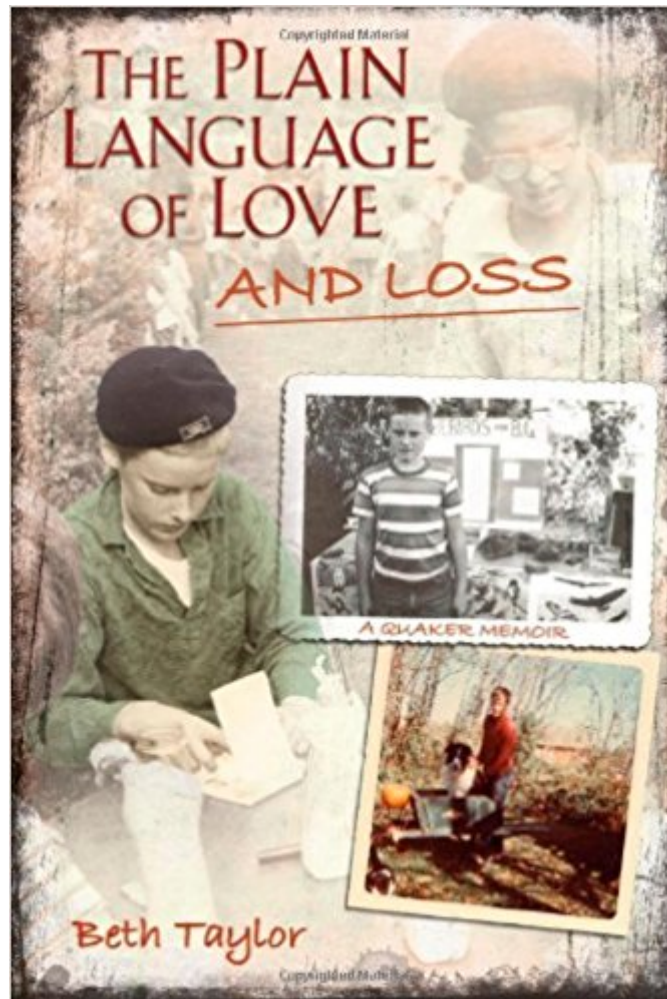


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The Plain Language Of Love And Loss: A Quaker Memoir



Synopsis

On November 16, 1965, Beth Taylor's idyllic childhood was shattered at age twelve by the suicide of her older brother Geoff. Raised in an intentional community north of Philadelphia—a mix of farm village, hippie commune, and suburb—she and her siblings were instilled with nonconformist values and respect for the Quaker tradition. With the loss of her beloved brother, Taylor began her complicated journey to understand family, loss, and faith. Written after years of contemplation, *The Plain Language of Love and Loss* reflects on the meaning of death and loss for three generations of Taylor's family and their friends. Her compelling portrait of Geoff reveals a boy whose understanding of who he was came under increasing attack. He was harassed by schoolmates for being a "commie pinko coward" and he tried to appease fellow Boy Scouts after he abstained from a support-the-troops rally. Touching on the timely issues of bullying, child rearing, and nonconformity, Taylor offers a rare look at growing up Quaker in the tumultuous 1960s. Taylor tells how each stage of her life exposed clues to the subtle damage wrought by tragedy, even while it revealed varieties of solace found in friendships, marriage, and parenting. As she struggles to understand the complexities of religious heritage, patriotism, and pacifism, she weaves the story of her own family together with the larger history of Quakers in the Northeast, showing the importance of family values and the impact of religious education. Beth Taylor says that she learned many things from her childhood, in particular that history is alive—and shapes how we judge ourselves and choose to live our lives. She comes to see that grief can be a mask, a lover, and a teacher.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a very moving story of what it was like to grow up in a Quaker family during and after the Viet Nam War. She deals forthrightly with the inevitable conflict that comes through our need to fit in with our peers while maintaining the values inculcated by our family. She also deals with the inevitable shading or blurring of recollection that we face when we try to find out what really happened decades ago, why, and what it meant. The portraits she draws of her family members are sharp and clear.

This book starts out slowly but gathers steam and power as Beth Taylor, the inquiring journalist and self-journalist, proceeds to interrogate the tragedy of suicide. Her brother Geoff hanged himself at age 14; this book documents the mantle of mystery that always hangs over self-destruction and the legacy of depression it engenders. The last chapter is in the tradition of a Quaker spiritual autobiography, as Beth explains why we need a concept of Sin and a Christ-centered church in order to achieve forgiveness - every week. The narrator is fearless in confronting even her powerful father and diagnosing her parents' marriage and revealing undefined stresses in her own marriage -- all to demonstrate the courage one needs to live fully and be true to one's self. This three-hankie book is much more than the usual tale of sad loss.

I bought this book mostly because I went to George School, a Quaker boarding school. I didn't expect to like the book as much as I did. I've read over 100 memoirs and this is one of the best I've ever read. It is very well written. I read it in two sittings. It is an honest account of a tragic death of a loved one and how a family copes with the loss.

Although suicide seems to be the obvious answer to the person who took their own life it leaves all friends and family with more confusion and unanswered questions that will never be explained. Beth Taylor tries to make sense of her family's tragedy as she recollects the history and post events that occurred before and after her brother's death. I enjoyed the cathartic experience she brings us through as she makes peace with the moment her life changed forever. My best friend took his life five years ago. This book helped me to cope with some of my own unanswered questions.

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