



You Can't Catch Death

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In all of the obituaries and writing about Richard Brautigan that appeared after his suicide, none revealed to Ianthe Brautigan the father she knew. Through it took all of her courage, she delved into her memories, good and bad, to retrieve him, and began to write. *You Can't Catch Death* is a frank, courageous, heartbreaking reflection on both a remarkable man and the child he left behind.

You Can't Catch Death Details

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Helen says

Although this book offered insights to Richard Brautigan's life that only Ianthe could, I'm not sure that it was written in quite the tone or with quite the magic with which would have been admirable and delicious as a memoir to an author who, on reading his work, makes me absolutely childishly delighted. It would have been nice if some of the Brautigan magic could have been apparent in this book, but I suppose the sole purpose of a memoir isn't to delight or fill the reader with a sense of magic or happiness. I found that the writing style lacked a bit of lustre to me, in that, the only parts I could truly enjoy were the memories of her father. I think this may have been a better read had she first established a picture of herself, and of the ways that her life have changed because of her father. I think the links were too few and far apart. I.e. Ianthe's reasoning for stopping to drink is hardly related to her father. An introduction to who Ianthe is would have proved a better means for understanding her memories and mind. But it was enjoyable and offers an unknown glimpse into her father's life which only she could.

Quinton Blue says

I read this book because of curiosity about Richard Brautigan, but the book is much more than that. "You Can't Catch Death: A Daughter's Memoir" is about the unconventional and poignant relationship between a daughter and her alcoholic novelist-poet father. If there is a third character in this, it's the booze that claims a negative presence and eventually plays a key role in RB's suicide. Ianthe Brautigan is a very good writer in her own space, and I wish she had more books out there. "A Daughter's Memoir" reflects both the love between a daughter and father and a sense of abandonment. This book would make an interesting movie in the hands of the right screenwriter. Note to Ianthe: Please write more.

Jim says

I'd read most of *Dream Catcher* - written by Salinger's daughter, Margaret - a year or two beforehand and so, when I stumbled across this book I jumped at it. I have to say I really enjoyed it. It is quite sad because Brautigan killed himself and here is his daughter, who was nine years old when he died, trying to connect with him. The chapters are very short and it's not hard to see that she's his daughter.

Willem says

This is a maybe overly upbeat book of a daughter coming to terms with her father's suicide. She glosses over his black moments (alcoholic rages, refusing to come to her wedding) and instead chooses to remember his loving moments, as probably a child should do.

She records her life with her father in San Francisco, Montana and Japan and her pursuit of her father's childhood on a road trip to Washington : meeting a grandmother she never met and trying to understand her father's early life. As well, she writes about her daughter and what her father missed never knowing her.

The author engages the reader through her dreams and horror at her father's suicide. (Blood soaked manuscripts eaten at by maggots)

In the end, she comes to terms with her father's suicide, recognizing how a life can continue even in death

and we learn more about her father, beat author, Richard Brautigan.

Christopher Litsinger says

Ianthe Brautigan's struggle to come to terms with her father's brilliance, love, alcoholism and suicide is captured in a nearly perfect package in this book. She has obviously inherited her father's gift for words, and I'm deeply disappointed that she hasn't written many more books for me to immediately go out and read. You want passages? I'm tempted to simply excerpt the entire book, because it's that good, but I think that might get me in trouble so here are two:

We never talked about his mother or his hospital stay again. That night became a ten-year-old shadowy conversation. Sometimes I'm tempted to take a sponge and some soap and wash away all the shadowy conversations, but they are all I have left.

He was very famous by then. I didn't realize this. I just wished that he could stay longer, but of course he couldn't. The smiling, gracious people were taking him somewhere else. I consoled myself knowing he was now only a bus ride away.

The rest of the birthday was a good one, except now I can feel the ache in my arms as I waved after the car that took him away one more time.

Amelia-Marie says

Ianthe Brautigan Swensen was my first professor at Sonoma State in the fall of 2013. In her class she mentioned two things in particular which stood out: one, her memoir concerning her famous poet father, Richard Brautigan, and the other a place, The Sitting Room. I began going to The Sitting Room in freshman year so it is rather fitting, now as an intern at the very place which brings me so much joy, how it brought me full circle in my ability to borrow and finally read her memoir. She set my life on a course to a place which became a home when I was in desperate need for one.

Beyond the personal connection, this is a beautiful memoir written by a daughter who did not see her father as she knew him reflected in the words the world chose to use concerning him after his suicide. This is not a book you can read in one sitting. You can, but it is not meant to be read as such. The memories inside were deconstructed over a long period of time and presented in a way which feels honest and nonjudgmental. Only curiosity and a certain sense of safety remain. This memoir is hard won, beautifully written, and a tribute to her loving imperfect father as well as a tribute to the unconditional love of a daughter.

Randy says

I am a recovering alcoholic who was once hospitalized to protect me from myself (5150'd it's called in

California). I had no idea what I'd find when I discovered this book in my local library; my primary interest was Richard Brautigan. I read and I cried as I realized the impact my alcoholism and self-destructive ways must have had on my ex-wife and son. I wish all children could and would write as well as Ianthe about their lives under these conditions. This was NOT a downer book for me. It should be required reading for all parents who don't spend enough sober time with their children. I've become positively evangelical about this book.

Tom says

This beautiful little volume is a tender love letter from a daughter to her troubled father, author Richard Brautigan, who lapsed into alcoholism and eventually suicide in 1984. Growing up and moving from house to house between her two separated parents could not have been easy, but Ianthe describes her childhood as generally a happy one. Some of the best Brautigan anecdotes are included here, and they take on a slightly different character when told from the vantage point of a young girl who loves the subject--her father. She handles Brautigan's gradual descent into alcoholism and paranoia gently. Near the end of her memoir, Ianthe seeks out the grandmother she never knew, the mother that Brautigan walked away from many years before and repudiated throughout his life. Her meeting her grandmother represents a kind of redemption for Ianthe and a chance to understand her father better. Another powerful aspect of this book is her style, which is remarkably similar to her father's, whether intentionally or inadvertently I can't say. But the short chapters and the shifting of time sequences from past to present and back again is very much Richard Brautigan's style, and Ianthe echoes it masterfully. A very powerful read.

Annie Smith says

Ianthe Brautigan's memoir of her dad is so worth reading if you so have the urge. Connected on many different levels - unfortunately.

"Where did that kid go, Mother?
I don't know, Father. ...
I don't see him anywhere.
I guess he's gone.
Maybe he went home." - Richard Brautigan
So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away

Debi G. says

Richard Brautigan rocked my expectations from literature. Sophomore and junior years of high school, I adored the beatniks and wished I could have lived among their ranks. It was not Kerouac, nor Ginsberg, nor Ferlinghetti (though I loved to visit City Lights and stroll through North Beach) that I most admired; it was Brautigan.

Because of this, Ianthe Brautigan's tome was a must-read. I admire that she wrote the book for herself and not for fans like myself. It ensured a personal and honest result, allowing the public to glimpse the family dynamic, the eccentricities, and the overall trajectory of Brautigan's life.

Of course I still wish I knew more, but so does the author. By the end, I neither pity nor envy Iantha, but I do commend her for writing what must have been an exceedingly challenging book to write and to share.

Brett says

Ianthe inherited her fathers grace and subltly. Any Brautigan fan should read this.. She carries the torch as she recounts her childhood and proceses the suicide of her father. A sad but beautiful book. xo b

Jarret Lovell says

A beautiful memoir by the daughter of Richard Brautigan. For me, Brautigan has always been surrounded in mystery. I sometimes feel that the less I know about him, the more I will enjoy his writing, as narration and personal reflection play such a strong role in some of his writing. I figure, "Why let the artist get in the way of the art?" At the same time, Brautigan is such an interesting, quirky and funny writer that one cannot help but want to learn more about the persona behind the writing, not to mention the photographs that don each book cover. YOU CAN'T CATCH DEATH strikes the perfect balance; it is neither a biography nor a character dissection. Instead, it is a memoir written by Brautigan's daughter who - sadly - often had the burden of being a bedrock during her father's depression, and who uses the pages of her memoir to come to terms with her father's suicide. The book, then, is not about Brautigan, nor about Ianthe, but about their relationship. And this makes for quite beautiful and touching reading. It provides enough background information on Brautigan to help understand the art and artist without feeling voyeuristic. It also introduces the reader to Ianthe's writing which is quite beautiful in its own right.

One of the delights of YOU CAN'T CATCH DEATH is the format with which Ianthe chose to write her memoir. Like her father's writings, DEATH hovers somewhere between poetry and prose. Like her father's work, each word is carefully chosen; nothing is extraneous and every word carries significance. Like Brautigan's many writings, Ianthe's writing is playful while tackling heavy themese (what can be more heavy than suicide?) There is also pure artistry here - such as when Ianthe imagines her father in heaven teaching Kurt Cobain to fish, while Cobain teaches Brautigan guitar cords. Yet another delight is learning that many of the "imaginings" of Brautigan's writings are in fact autobiographical. This I found enhanced my appreciation of Brautigan, though I feared that it might detract from the mystique of his "fiction." Simply put: one gains just the amount of background information on Brautigan, and nothing more. Perfect.

Much thanks to Ianthe Brautigan for her memoir. It is a beautiful work of art.

Scott Walker says

I would highly recommend this to anyone interested in knowing Brautigan a little better--his daughter is an excellent writer herself, and this book is her attempt to come to terms with his suicide--it is also a beautiful homage to fathers in general, made even more touching by the inclusion of family photos. She also references many of Brautigan's writer friends such as Robert Creeley, Tom McGuane, Jim Harrison; and

actors/directors like Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson, Francis Ford Coppola, and Hal Ashby (of Harold and Maude/Being There fame), who almost filmed Brautigan's *The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western*.

Janet says

Recommended by Greg Wittig :-)

Lovely engrossing daughter's dig into her famous father's suicide.

"Sometimes the love I have for my father overtakes my whole being, and I want to leap into the air and grab onto whatever color is there to express how my heart feels. At times like those I envision myself as a sort of sky acrobat, swinging from handhold to handhold in the blue atmosphere. This love is not weak and doesn't fail and remains forever mine."

Nicole Harkin says

Told as a series of vignettes, the book describes one daughter's relationship with her father, who eventually kills himself. I am on a memoir kick, and can't remember who recommended the book to me, but it was a lovely read.

Mrs. Brautigan's father was a famous writer and throughout the book famous people flit in and out, seemingly to behave like the real people that they are. Her father split his time between San Francisco and a ranch outside of Bozeman. Ianthe did the same.

Pictures of her, and her father, are interspersed throughout the book. By page 100 I felt the suicide and her relationship to her father had been well and interestingly covered. I was ready to move on, until I remembered that a mini-mystery was also involved in the book. We know from the book jacket that Mr. Brautigan had cut off all relationship to his family in his early twenties, but we don't know why. The cut was so final that for years Mrs. Brautigan did not know anything about her grandmother: not her name and not where she lived. I kept reading to find out the why. I suppose I never got any closure on that point, something I only noticed now as I was typing this.

So far as learning from how this memoir is pieced together, I really liked how some of her chapters are very long and some are only one line. I thought her chapter titles were superb, and I usually skip over chapter titles. She deftly interweaves clips of her father's writing where apt in the book as well. I also found the length informative: 209 pages. Books take as long to tell as they take, but I find good examples of lengths worthy of noting. Finally, I loved how she put in information that was inter generational. We hear not only about her fears for her father, but her fears for herself and her daughter.

There were a few instances where she repeated something she had already told me, which I found annoying. And one quote had a typo in it...strange that I noticed.

This is a book to read. Well done, fast, and really gives you a glimpse into, not only the past, but also the pain of living with someone who is mentally ill, yet genius.

ps I also noted that Ianthe worked at Chico Hot Springs in the late 70's at the same time my parents drove across the US and considered buying the hot springs. I wonder if I already crossed paths with her. Funny.

