



The Eyes of the Heart: A Memoir of the Lost and Found

Frederick Buechner

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From critically acclaimed author and Pulitzer Prize runner-up Frederick Buechner comes another powerfully honest memoir, *The Eyes of the Heart*. Full of poignant insights into his most personal relationships, this moving account traces how the author was shaped as much by his family's secrets as by its celebrations. Within the innermost chambers of his consciousness, Buechner, in his characteristically self-searching style, explores the mysteries and truths behind his deepest connections to family, friends, and mentors. Extraordinarily moving, this memoir follows not chronology but the converging paths of Buechner's imagination and memory.

Buechner invites us into his library-his own Magic Kingdom. Surrounded by his beloved books and treasures, we discover how they serve as the gateway to Buechner's mind and heart. He draws the reader into his recollections, moving seamlessly from reminiscence to contemplation. Buechner recounts events such as the tragic suicide of his father and its continual fallout on his life, intimate and little-known details about his deep friendship with the late poet James Merrill, and his ongoing struggle to understand the complexities of his relationship to his mother.

This cast of characters comprised of Buechner's relatives and loved ones is brought to vibrant life by his peerless writing and capacity to probe the depths of his own consciousness. Buechner visits his past with an honest eye and a heart open to the most painful and life-altering of realizations. Heartbreaking and enlightening, *The Eyes of the Heart* is a treasure for any who have ever pondered the meaning and mystery of their own past.

As "one of our finest writers," according to author Annie Dillard, Frederick Buechner provides yet another chapter in the tale of his life in this gripping memoir tracing the complicated roots and path of his inner life and family, with their multitude of intersections." *The Eyes of the Heart* stands as a touching testimonial to the significance of kinship to the author as well as to the legions of readers who have come to regard him as one of their own.

The Eyes of the Heart: A Memoir of the Lost and Found Details

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Author : Frederick Buechner

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Joy says

I really like the warm heart and practical wisdom of Buechner. There were two particularly sad passages in this book. "I wonder what will happen, when I die, to all the marvelous books I've been collecting all my life, because none of my children seem to have any particular interest in them, and to all the old family letters and documents and photographs I have amassed and filed away in the little entrance room along with the diaries I have kept for the past 40years or so with their relentless and nearly illegible account of where we went and who went with us and what we did when we got there." Buechner has three daughters, but he has also given some of his 'papers' to Wheaton College. Maybe they will want more.

About his mother: "The sadness of other people's lives, even the people she loved, never seemed to touch her where she lived. I don't know why. It wasn't that she had a hard heart, I think -- in many ways she was warm, sympathetic, generous -- but that she had a heart that for one reason or another she kept permanently closed to other people's suffering, as well as to the darkest corners of her own."

Valerie says

I've been sick today, not bad, just enough to finish 3 books. This book made me long to have a family historian in the family - someone other than me, someone who knows the family history and considers it sacred. He covers his family history so methodically and thoughtfully. I was moved several times. Like when he saw his grandson for the first time. He climbed the stairs to meet his daughter coming down with her new baby. He knew at that moment he would lay down his life for this baby. He said it's the mystery of kinship. It was profound the way he put it. He explores mortality and puts it in beautiful and poignant words. A beautiful book if you're a fan of Frederick Buechner.

Something that made me chuckle and I could see the old man saying it: When asked if someone had passed away, he'd reply, "Passed away? Good God, he's dead!"

Thoughts to ponder:

When his mom asked a serious question about death, she tuned him out for his answer. He said, just to have asked the question seemed for the time being to be as much as she could handle.

"When you die you're given back your life again."

In life you move forward, "Leg over leg the dog went to Dover."

Each time members of the tribe die, the self we were with them dies too and when a baby is born into the tribe, nothing is ever the same again.

Trisha says

Beuchner speaks beautifully of books and regrets and grief and the imprints we leave on each other's lives, especially parents on their children. It's a wonder that our hearts know and bear so much pain. He asks aloud questions we all have-what legacy will we leave behind? Will anyone care when we're gone? What happens when we die? There's a depth of sharing here that makes one ponder the lifting of the veil on family secrets. Are these ours to know? Were all of them his to share? Most importantly, Buechner, a Presbyterian minister, should know the solid truth of the Gospel, and that certainly isn't offered here, in spite of the perfect opportunity. If he had ever found the truth, this book, as lovely as it is in so many other ways, declares he's lost it, and that's the saddest part of this memoir.

Chuck Denison says

Freddie Buechner has written four previous memoirs. By now the material is thin. In this, his latest memoir at 70 he is trolling through family ancestors and old boxes of photographs, talking to his long dead grandmother about a dead friend or a dead brother It is a bit weird and just, well, private. Buechner's been good with titles like "Telling Secrets", but this time, this is stuff I don't really want to know or particularly care about. It is, of course, nicely and delicately written, and it might get you thinking.

Jonathan says

Alternately heartwarming and heartbreakng. This is Buechner's fourth memoir, and no, that's not too much in light of his 80 or so years, life experiences, and body of work. He touches on so many subjects -- his friendship with the late poet James Merrill, his family tragedy, some of his great works, and the life well lived. The touch Buechner gives whatever he is writing about is the most gentle and yet most searing touch I have encountered in literature. I love to read him when I am in need of calm in my own life.

Beth says

Buechner remembering the people in his life who have passed to death before him. It's hopeful, not depressing or sad. It's gentle and tender. A short and very worthwhile read.

Quote:

"What has he prepared for those who love him?" she says, repeating my question. "Things aren't the way I always believed they were. Thy mystery is not only a mystery still but deeper and grander than I ever supposed. It reminds me of how, when you're looking up at the sky, sometimes there's a break in the clouds and all of a sudden, lo and behold, you catch a glimpse through it of the real sky. The most I can tell you is that I think it's we ourselves he is preparing. Not just the ones who love him-"

Title from Ephesians 1:18 "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints"

Melanie Griffin says

Beautifully written. His sentences can take your breath away. This is a lovely memoir which takes off from the books and objects in the "Magical Kingdom" of his library/study and ambles through the history of his

ancestors, with guest appearances by some apparitions along the way. Slightly mystical, but very matter-of-fact. He is facing mortality here, having turned seventy, and is I think looking for the traces left by those who have gone before. He is also processing the death of his brother as he writes the book, so the overall effect is somewhat sobering. Great read. It's my first Buechner book - I've read so much *about* him, but never his own work before. Can't wait for more.

Patty says

"I wonder what will happen, when I die, to all the marvelous books I've been collecting all my life, because none of my children seem to have any particular interest in them, and to all the old family letters and documents and photographs I have amassed and filed away in the little entrance room along with the diaries I have kept for the past 40 years or so with their relentless and nearly illegible account of where we went and who went with us and what we did when we got there."

I started this memoir several years ago when my mom brought a copy with her on a visit. It took me awhile to get another copy and get back to it. Of course, I had to start over since much had faded in my brain.

This story is about three rooms and their contents in Buechner's home. It is a strange little book – how many people would write about their stuff in the way Buechner writes about his? Some of us have tried to get rid of the flotsam of previous generations. Some of us never had it to collect in the first place.

However, Buechner has the stuff and the memories to go with it all. Which leads him to think about those in his life who have died. He writes carefully and with great love about his father and mother, his grandparents and others who have had influence in his life. Although I found this book a bit odd, I was really moved by Buechner's reflections about his loved ones and where they might be now.

If you have read any of Buechner's essays or memoirs, I suggest you pick up this one too. There is much to ponder and learn. If Buechner is new to you, please find one of his novels or **The Magnificent Defeat** which is a collection of sermons. Those books would be a better place to start your conversation with this wonderful writer.

Bruce says

Another in a series of spiritual autobiographies/memoirs by Buechner in which he weaves reflections on faith and hope into the story of his life. In this one he spends significant time on the past lives of his grand and great grandparents and how his life is connected to theirs. The setting is his library/ study which also contains many objects of memorabilia. He artfully uses these objects as touchstones to begin his reminiscences. Parts of them have appeared in earlier books and as such I think this one is not one of his best. As always, however, Buechner writes with clarity, honesty and emotion. He is such a good writer that any of his books, no exception in this present instance, will have ample rewards.

Mary says

I found this to be the strangest of Buechner's three memoirs. It is set in his Magic Kingdom, a series of rooms including his library and office in which he has the artifacts of a lifetime including books, papers, statuary, etc. He is visited there by his beloved and deceased Naya, his grandmother, who talks to him of death and life beyond death. He writes of his father and his mother who were not nurturing parents, of his dear brother Jamie, and his friend the poet James Merrill. He tells a long tale about his great-grandfather Jules who was injured in the Civil War and died years later of his wound.

Some of these stories were told in his other books, especially the difficult tale of his father's suicide. It all seemed somewhat disjointed. And yet I kept reading and there were times of honesty and doubt and faith that kept me going.

The title of the book comes from Ephesians in which Paul asks God to give him "a spirit of revelation in the knowledge of him" and "having the eyes of your heart enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you."

Donovan says

Wonderful writing - Buechner opens his heart and shares his hidden fears and loves.

Andrew says

It's Buechner - the beloved Buechner (as I heard someone describe him the other day) - it gets four stars at least, even before you've finished reading the first page.

I reckon I could read him writing about anything and end up feeling like it was reading time well spent. He's an artist, a true writer.

This book is beautifully set in his study library (aka the 'Magic Kingdom'), the different objects and books bringing to life memories and visions of those he loved and loves.

As in his other three memoirs, he circles back on key life experiences and people, elaborating more and viewing them from different angles and in different lights.

He seems a bit discombobulated in this one. Conscious of his age and wondering how much longer he's got. More speculative about what lies beyond, even unorthodox. Then, in his inimitable way he peacefully and hopefully lands it in the depth of faith.

The question he had in 1999 (when this book was published) about how much longer he might have on earth remains unanswered. The beloved one is still with us, aged 91. We'll miss him when he's gone, but his autobiographical works will keep him alive to us and known for years to come.

Andrea Engle says

Comforting memories of several family members and friends ... like several I know as they age, the writer has expanded his love of family history into a book-length reminiscence ... most memorable is the prayer he wrote for his dying, younger brother: "Dear Lord, bring me through darkness into light. Bring me through pain into peace. Bring me through death into life. Be with me wherever I go, and with everyone I love. In Christ's name I ask it. Amen." ...

Lori says

I loved it! I had to keep my want to read book list next to me because he talked about so many books. Oh I wish I had a library like his it sounds amazing! It was great to hear about his views on life and death through the stories of his family and friends. I have so many more thoughts. But I'm not sure what to write so I'll leave it at that.

Rob Sharpe says

Being a typical man tears are often the last thing my eyes want to give. Being an little less than typical man I read Frederick Buechner.

As I read this memoir I came to a part that prompted tears.

This book recount Buechner's fractured relationship among his immediate family and the subsequent attempts at restoring relationships after the suicide of his father. Buechner is a wonderful writer and this memoir is an absolute jewel.

Helene says

I love Buechner's conversational tone--he makes me feel like we are friends and talking face-to-face. Although there is repetition between books, that is not a problem. When friends talk there are bound to be stories that are repeated with fresh perspectives and insights. His ability to combine non-fiction with imagination, poetic thoughts and theology is a delight.

Elliot says

There are a few flashes of really insightful and evocative writing about grief and death, but in general this is not the best Buechner. Not even the best memoir.

Natalie says

A balm, I think, for anyone processing grief or death.

Juli says

This is a memoir about Buechner's extended family. I normally wouldn't be all that interested in family history that wasn't my own but Buechner has a way of drawing me in no matter what he is talking about. I just love how he captures thoughts about life, faith, interactions with people, and personal struggles. This one found me with quite a few tears at the end. A beautiful account of the good and bad of being a part of family.

Gale says

PRESERVING THE MAGIC KINGDOM

Sharing intimate details of his childhood and adult memories--in a kaleidoscope of chronology which requires flexibility on the part of the reader--Buechner offers a gentle autobiographical patchwork of his life. He invites us graciously into the most hallowed rooms of his heart, describing precious objects whose existence and display coalesce into his own personal magic kingdom. We are treated as his honored guests, allowed free access into the privacy of sacred spaces: his home, his family archives and his fluid imagination. He reveals the dreams and feelings, labors and heartache of various family members going several generations back. Not because they were noteworthy in the eyes of the world; instead because he painstakingly acquired the knowledge, and now is willing to share their human experiences with his unknown readers--experiences which just might echo our own.

Mainly the author presents conversations with those dear ones who have gone on before. He, like us, seeks to know what really Happens after death. Endowing his characters with post-terrestrial information and wisdom, he seeks to calm his fear of the great unknown (and ours) by spiritual rationalization as viewed through "the eyes of the heart"--a quotation from Ephesians. We learn much about his family of course, but also about literature and his favorite authors, such as Trollope. Striving to comfort himself and his readers about those who have been Lost, he assures us that they have also been Found in afterlife by a benevolent Divinity--a message which offers desperately-needed peace and hope for those who grieve. This plotless book consists of variations on one theme, so it can not be classified as a novel, yet it remains much more than mere autobiography. I recommend this book for introspective readers who seek meaning in this world, especially after suffering the loss of beloved ones. Take hope--take heart--as Buechner strives to assuage our pain and our fears about the post-human condition.

(January 4, 2011.)
