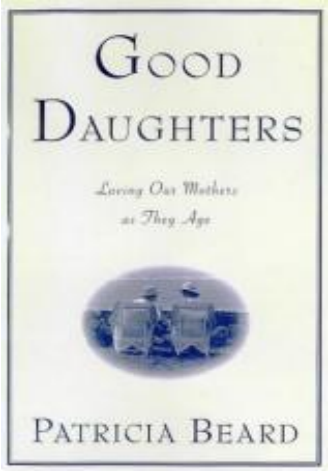
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Good Daughters

by Patricia Beard



About the Book

"What shall we do about our mothers?"

Millions of adult daughters ask one another this question as their mothers age, show signs of wearing down, fight illnesses and loneliness, and sometimes outlive their savings. Caught between caring for their mothers and responsibilities to children, jobs, and other family members, women in midlife are affected by guilt, anger, and anxiety as they struggle to be good daughters.

Journalist-and daughter-Patricia Beard concludes, "We are not just asking ourselves where our mothers should live, or whether they should have a knee replacement. I think we want to know what we can do about the way we feel about our mothers. How can we make our peace with the mothers we have, instead of longing for the mothers we wish we had? What does it mean to be a good daughter to an aging mother now? Why is it so hard? How can we do better? And how can we prepare ourselves for a future when we will never again be able to dial our mothers on the phone and hear their voices?"

Good Daughters explores the changes in the culture that put added pressure on women in midlife, the innate push and pull of the mother-daughter relationship that sets up tension at any age, the reality of being old in our society, and the new role daughters formulate as their mothers grow older. In stories gathered from hundreds of interviews with women whose relationships with their mothers range from nearly perfect to troubled, **Good Daughters** is clearheaded and openhearted about the practical and emotional problems mothers and daughters face.

Written in a lyrical voice, with humor, understanding, and empathy for both generations, this book is both sensible and inspirational. **Good Daughters** shows how even when a mother's aging is difficult, the last phase can provide opportunities to enrich relationships, and that mothers and daughters can face change and loss with courage and compassion.

Discussion Guide

1. The book defines a good daughter as responsible, companionable, and loving. How does that play out in the stories in **Good Daughters**? In real life?

2. What interfered with particular women's ability to be good daughters? How about among the women you know?

3. **Good Daughters** reports that aging mothers want to be independent. How did the daughters in the book respect that desire?

4. What are the signals that tell a daughter it is appropriate to interfere? Did some of the daughters in the book step in too soon? Did some wait too long?

5. How much mothering do women expect from their own mothers, even when their health and strength are declining? What do we expect without realizing it?

6. What common irritants cropped up among the daughters in the book? How about among your friends? Does it help to know that others have similar experiences?

7. When is it too late to "fix" long-standing grievances? What can you do when your mother can't participate in your relationship anymore?

8. Would some daughters be better off putting plenty of distance between themselves and their mothers? How have some daughters of truly difficult mothers preserved their equanimity without entirely abandoning their mothers?

9. What are some of the approaches the book offers to moderate the effects of long-distance daughtering so mothers won't feel as isolated, and daughters can assess their condition and needs? What approaches have you heard about that you can share with others?

10. What do elderly mothers want from their daughters? How much of what they want and need can their daughters provide?

11. Where do you draw the line betweeen duty and self-preservation when you have many responsibilities competing for your attention; or if you have a particularly difficult mother?

12. How can mothers and daughters who live together share a household respectfully and companionably?

13. The daughters in the book didn't seem to have "one last thing" they wanted to say to their mothers to straighten out their relationship. Is that realistic?

14. What have you learned from **Good Daughters**, and from your own and others' experiences that will change the way you treat your mother? Have you learned anything that will help you plan ahead, so you will be a "good mother" when you are elderly and your daughter is in your position?

Author Bio

Patricia Beard is the author of 11 nonfiction books, one novel and hundreds of magazine articles. A former features editor of *Town & Country* and *Mirabella*, and former contributing editor of *ELLE*, FACE THE MUSIC is her first collaboration.

Critical Praise

" Patricia Beard has rendered a valuable service to all with her book *Good Daughters: Loving Our Mothers As They Age* ....We do face a demographic revolution. Life expectancy has increased dramatically in this century. The increased longevity is a triumph, not a problem. The problem is that we have not figured out the implications of the added years we have, nor have we changed our way of thinking about aging, work, retirement, and relationships. The relationships of children and parents are lasting longer than ever. Part of this relationship is caregiving. Add to this the unresolved issues that mothers and daughters have with each other, these added years can be a mixed blessing. Ms. Beard's book is fascinating and informative. It is a valuable resource for everyone -- not just women. It is a book that I highly recommend and one that I will be giving to many friends. "

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