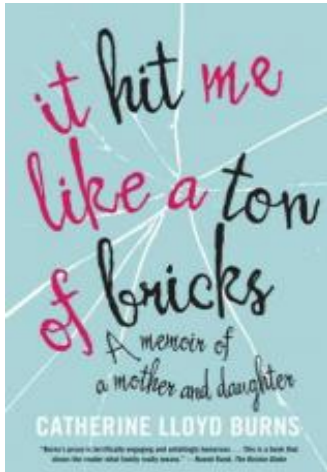


It Hit Me Like a Ton of Bricks: A Memoir of a Mother and Daughter

by Catherine Lloyd Burns



About the Book

Catherine Burns's father died suddenly when she was nine years old, leaving her to cope with a disorienting grief process and a mother who believed that long-term mourning was for the weak. In the years that followed, mother and daughter developed a volatile yet sometimes profoundly tender relationship, now captured in mesmerizing detail in **It Hit Me Like a Ton of Bricks**. A blend of deadpan humor, sparkling wit, and moving ironies, Burns's recollections weave her childhood memories with scenes from her life as a rising actress. When she becomes a mother herself, she faces renewed questions about the nature of good parenting while experiencing a maternal love that surpasses any intensity she has ever known. A realistic depiction of the strained dynamics many families face, this is a captivating account of parent and child and the quirky bonds that sustain them.

Discussion Guide

The questions and discussion topics that follow are designed to enhance your reading of Catherine Lloyd Burns's **It Hit Me Like a Ton of Bricks**. We hope they will enrich your experience as you explore this wry and candid portrait of a daughter and her mother.

1. As the author describes the trauma of her father's death, it's clear that she and her mother reacted to that event in very different ways. What does the author tell us about the way her mother approached grief? Were those differences a result of being raised in different generations, having different temperaments, or other factors?
2. Discuss Catherine's experiences with the lewd doorman. How did those memories affect her sense of security in the world? How would you have responded if you had been her mother?
3. How would you characterize the author's storytelling voice? What enables her to move seamlessly between poignant

moments, gritty scenes, and incidents of pure comedy? What are the essential elements in capturing a life story?

4. What image did Catherine's mother try to shape for herself and for her daughter? Did having Canadian roots shape her perception of which type of New Yorker she wanted to become? How did Catherine's mother seem to feel about their family's legacy, especially as it relates to the era of the Holocaust?

5. What vulnerabilities does Catherine show when describing her shifting attitudes toward her mother? What does it take to launch her into a moment of loving her mother intensely, or feeling intensely devastated by her?

6. Discuss the book's varying locales. Did you notice any distinctions between the author's life on the East Coast versus on the West Coast, or a shift in tension at her mother's home on Long Island?

7. In what way did Catherine's childhood prepare her for a career as an actress?

8. In "It's a Man's World," which opens Part Two, Catherine describes the additional responsibilities heaped on mothers. Do you agree with her assessment of this division of labor between moms and dads? How do her feelings about men shift throughout her experiences with marriage?

9. How does the author characterize her attitudes toward money at various stages of her life? Was her mother generous in material ways? How did Catherine change once she earned enough to comfortably afford her rent? What did their first-class trip to the spa indicate about the limitations of wealth in achieving emotional satisfaction?

10. Olive's arrival brought both deep love and extreme exhaustion to Catherine's life. In the book's dedication, the author hopes that her daughter "will be sensitive to my sensitivities when the time comes." What might Olive's version of a mother-daughter memoir look like?

11. When describing her daughter's potty woes, what is the author telling us about her experience with mothering in general? Were Olive's gastrointestinal issues ultimately medical or emotional in nature? Were they different from the food challenges Catherine faced earlier in her life?

12. What is the effect of the memoir's shifting timeline? How does it reflect the way memories are woven into daily experiences?

13. How does Catherine's portrait of her mother change in the book's closing episodes, as her mother faces aging and medical testing?

14. The book's title comes from the moment in the opening pages when the author's mother declares that she isn't responsible for her daughter's actions, even deadly ones. She says that this revelation hit her like a ton of bricks. In your opinion, where do the lines of responsibility lie in terms of parenting? In the end, how do you define a good mother?

15. How do the scenes in the book compare to your interactions with your mother? What distinctions exist between the ways sons and daughters respond to their mothers? What is unique about the mother-daughter tandem?

Author Bio

As an actress, Catherine Lloyd Burns has appeared on numerous television shows, including *Malcolm in the Middle*, *ER*, *Law & Order*, and Al Franken's *LateLine*. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and daughter. This is her first book.

Critical Praise

“Burns writes with considerable humor, albeit much of it dark, and her frankness is admirable. This is a disturbing, moving and thought-provoking book.”

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