

Your Mother Was a Person – A Work in Progress

by Louise Mitchell Palmer

READER'S GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Louise titled her book “Your Mother Was a Person”? How is the title symbolic of the book as a whole?
2. What do you think it means to be seen as “a person”? If you have children, do they see you as “a person”? Do you see your mother as “a person”?
3. What do you think are the themes of the book?
4. Louise has very close bonds with her grandfathers. What do you think she learned from them? How does Louise’s book help you connect with stories of your own parents and grandparents?
5. How does the close-knit community of Parowan where Louise grew up differ from your own childhood? How is it similar?
6. How would you describe Louise’s relationship with her mother? How does this parallel your relationship with your own mother?
7. Louise didn’t try to chronologically include *everything* that took place in her life—the stories primarily center on her early years as a child, with a few about her teen years, a handful about her grandparents and her mother, and only two about her marriage. The remaining stories are about her life as an adult in Castro Valley, California. Did the stories give you a good picture of who she is? Do you wish she wrote more about any other periods of her life? If so, which ones?
8. Some people might characterize this book as one in a series of LDS (Mormon) memoirs. Do you think that the reader needs to be familiar with Mormon life to really enjoy the book, or are the stories and poems universal, so that the experiences and ideas will resonate with any reader, regardless of religion?
9. Writers of autobiographical works have the option to self-edit the stories they publish, and have control over how much or how little of their true selves they expose to the reader. In what ways did Louise take risks and expose parts of herself that other writers might have otherwise kept obscured? If you were writing a book with this title, what stories of your own would you include? Would you be willing to expose yourself as Louise did? What parts of your life would you hope to keep obscured?
10. Louise wrote this book over the course of 20+ years. She says that once she started, she had little control over the volume or subject matter; the stories just demanded to be told. Is there “a book inside each person”? If so, what prevents more people from writing their stories?

11. How did you feel when you read the book? Which stories, poems or essays really “sang” for you? Which made you feel uncomfortable? Which made you question your interpretation of your own experiences?
12. From Louise’s story “One Sunday Morning”: “As I look back on this day and remember how incongruous I must have looked and acted in a dress that was much too mature for a child and most inappropriate for church, I remember the kindness of the people who have shaped my life: my Aunt Maude who made me a dress that I still remember with delight after 75 years, a sister who has always been able to make me laugh at improbable things, and Mrs. Rice and other teachers who encouraged me with wonderful purple stickers and gold stars, to be on my best behavior, to sit quietly and not giggle in church, and parents who have loved me in spite of it all.” How do you think the age at which Louise wrote her stories and poems changes their tone and perspective? How would they be different had she written at the time the stories occurred? How will your memoirs be different if you wait until you are 88 to write them?
13. Does growing up in a community that believes in ghosts, like the Cross-eyed Ghost residing in the old Parowan schoolhouse, makes one more susceptible to ghost sightings as an adult? Do you believe in ghosts?
14. Which aspects of the stories are timeless, and which aspects are indelibly married to the specific timeframe in which they actually took place?
15. How do you think gender and familial roles are now different from Louise’s experiences? Are these changes positive or negative?

Louise Mitchell is an active member of the Celsus Book Club in Castro Valley, California, and in the book’s acknowledgements, credits the club members for encouraging her to publish her writings. She would love to hear about your own Book Club (especially rave reviews about her book!). Book Clubs are invited to share their ideas, experiences and discussions – email your comments to LouiseMPalmer@gmail.com. We will post as many as possible. Please include your name and the name and location of your Book Club so that you can be credited.