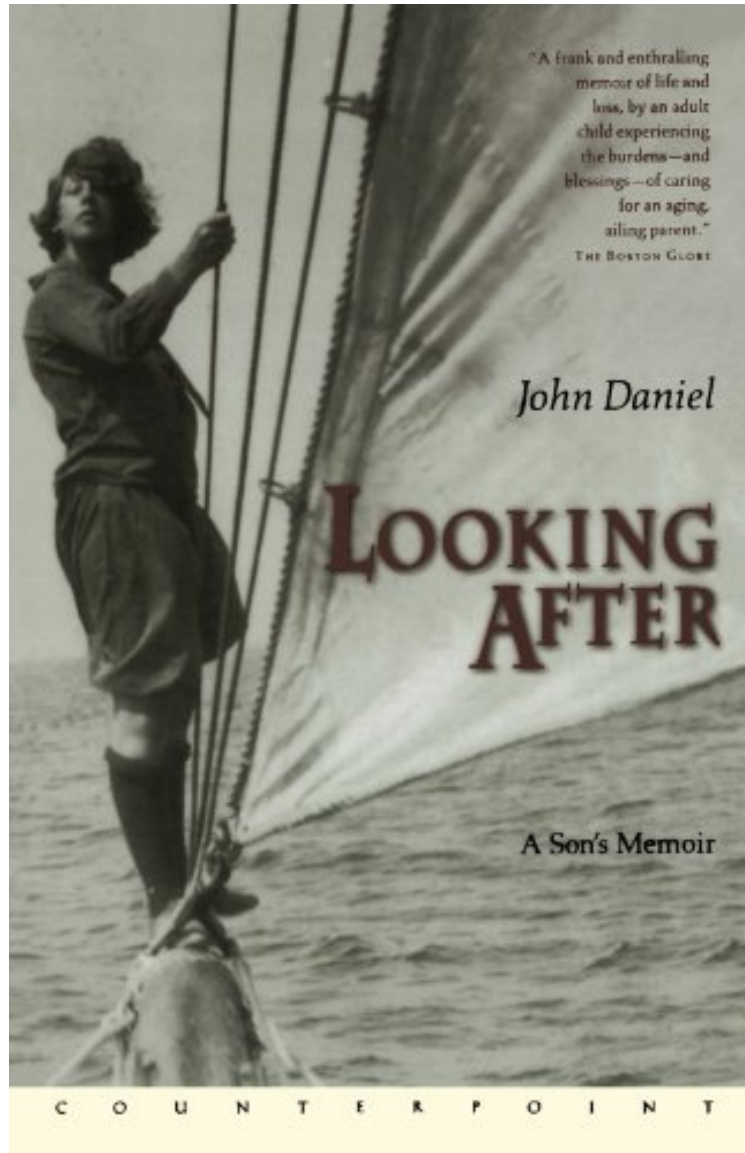


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Looking After: A Son's Memoir

John Daniel

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John Daniel : Looking After: A Son's Memoir before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Looking After: A Son's Memoir:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. INSIGHTS, GROWTH PAINBy old fellowA VERY WELL WRITTEN BOOK THAT GIVES DEEP INSIGHT INTO JOHN DANIEL HIS WORK. THIS BOOK DESCRIBES THE MEMORIES CONFLICTS DEVELOPED IN CARING FOR HIS MOTHER (BY HIM HIS WIFE) NEAR THE END OF HER LIFE. IT IS A VERY PERSONAL VIEW OF THE WRITER'S INTERNAL CONFLICTS HIS

EARLY SEPARATION FROM HIS MOTHER -A FREE AND VALIANT SEEKING SOUL, HIS FATHER DEDICATED TO LABOR UNIONS . IT IS A VIEW INTO JOHN DANIEL'S OWN SEARCHES. DANIEL'S "LOCK IN" WITH "NATURE" IS VERY EVIDENT. IT IS MUCH ABOUT ISOLATION LOOKING FOR CONNECTIONS CONTINUITY THAT MAY OR MAY NOT EXIST. THE HEROINE ON THE COVER, THE CONSTRUCTS OF VALUES EXPERIENCES ARE INSIGHTFUL INTO THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE -EVEN IF ALL A ROMANTIC FICTION OF HUMAN FUNCTION PURPOSE.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Stream Singing in DarknessBy John ThorndikeA gem. Admirably written and consistently fascinating, it's not for someone who's looking for a set of symptoms, or an account of all the ways an Alzheimer's patient can make things difficult. Instead, it's a nuanced portrait of a woman who led an idiosyncratic and dramatic life, followed by a typical--yet entirely particular--slide into dementia.I've read many Alzheimer's memoirs, and John Daniel's observations and emotions are often as familiar to me as the back of my hand. But I light up to see things put so deftly: "You don't get a second chance to live your mother's last years. She dies and it all freezes in place, everything you did and didn't do. I wish I could have been more patient with her, more supple, more willing to follow her lead instead of so often imposing my own will."Regret. What history of Alzheimer's comes without it? The patient is often anguished in some way, and the caretaker cannot avoid regret about the care he's given. But Daniel reaches behind the confines of his mother's hard last years. "My mother did not get cheated," he writes. "She wore her body down, played it out, scoured it away with living. Maybe she did end her life on purpose. And maybe she did it not because she felt unwanted, not because of anything I did or didn't do, but because the boat was failing her, and like the stream singing in darkness, she wanted to go on."This is a book worth a close slow reading, and a story that will stay with you.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy Suzanne McDonaldVery introspective, personal book.

A poet and an essayist, John Daniel weaves graceful meditations on the nature of memory, identity, aging, and the tenacity of family into this moving account of his mother's last years. Uneasy in his role as caregiver, Daniel struggles with guilt, embarrassment, and anger over his mother's transformation. As she loses her memory to Alzheimer's, he delves into his own in a passionate attempt to remember for her and for himself the remarkable history of their lives.

From Publishers WeeklyIn 1988, at the age of 80, Zilla, the author's independent, adventurous mother, became unable to continue living alone on the Maine seacoast and relocated to her son's home in Portland. Daniel, a poet (Common Ground), essayist (The Trail Home) and teacher, here relates the four difficult years he and his wife, Marilyn, spent caring for Zilla, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. In graceful, poignant prose, he describes how his mother, a former labor organizer and spiritual seeker who traveled to ashrams in India, declined into an increasingly helpless old woman. The author is at his best when recounting his sometimes fruitful attempts to communicate with Zilla and in describing the strain caretaking put on his marriage. His mother died in 1992. Daniel also recalls events from his childhood in an attempt to fight an ongoing depression. Although some of his memories are interesting, accounts of his LSD trips are repetitive, and his relentless introspection grows tiresome. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library JournalOstensibly, this memoir focuses on the last four years in the long, adventurous life of the physically and mentally failing Zilla Daniel while in the care of the author, her son. John himself is struggling with a midlife depression that is constantly clouding his prospects, after years of drifting and substance abuse. Daniel (who has produced two books of poetry as well as an increasingly influential body of environmental journalism) leaves no doubt here that he can breathe new life into the familiar metaphors of received wisdom. Just as the possible meanings of the title broaden as the narrative progresses, the book itself covers more territory, above and beneath its trendy surface appeal (aging-parent problem, Alzheimer's, Cascadia, hippiedom revisited, cats, and New Age psychodynamics). Underpinning the narrative is nothing less than a running essay on the nature of memory, culminating in the author's willingness--after closely witnessing his mother's mental decline--to abandon his previous notions of memory as a necessary determinant of human worth. Recommended for public and academic libraries.

John Dye, Panhandle State Univ., Goodwell, Okla. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Kirkus sFrankly autotherapeutic and, after a writerly start, wildly in need of pruning--though capable of uncommon felicity in rendering the nuances of a mother's dementia. Daniel, nature poet and essayist (The Trail Home, 1992), spirals through the streams of his self-consciousness in search of a sense of unity. He obsesses insistently, over his unhappy childhood, his protracted coming of age in the psychedelic counterculture, and his bittersweet challenge as caretaker of his fading, octogenarian mother, Zilla; and he is often too tortured to sustain the micro-mastery of capturing Zilla's surprise on looking down and seeing food on her plate midway through a meal, her stillness as "less like peace and more like vacancy," the cost to a marriage (the utter forfeiture of spontaneity) endemic to the territory of those attending an afflicted parent. Luckily, Zilla too was a seeker of unity--and a feisty one--who went from commune to ashram in her 70s, and the spiritual affinity between mother and son was among the reciprocities that bonded them during her four years in his Oregon home. Aware enough to take pleasure in Daniel's poetry readings, she was also still alert enough to suffer from a knowledge of her failing body. Like her creeping deafness, it became his burden also. "I knew she was blameless, and yet I blamed her"--universal enough, but then there's more--"because

she was what I got for a child." Daniel juxtaposes his despair over Zilla with his stillborn hopes for progeny--one among many bitter second guesses--until he relaxes into an aptly delineated epiphany: now 45, "I've reached limits I'm unlikely to transcend." In his relentless indulgence in self-examination, Daniel wears out his welcome long before the book's end, but his talent for fastidious apprehension cannot be dismissed. -- Copyright 1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.