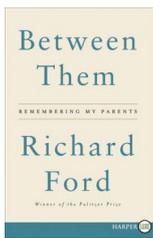


Between Them: Remembering My Parents



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It's a life-changing experience in adulthood when you begin to see your mother and father as individuals, separate from their parenting roles.

Richard Ford wrote a memoir of his father decades ago, as well as one of his mother, penned more recently. Now, in this joint memoir, he again remembers his parents, Parker and Edna, who both grew up in Arkansas.

The couple met in cosmopolitan Hot Springs, an international destination for the rich and famous in 1930s, many of whom came for the natural baths there. At age sixteen, after her parents pulled her out of Catholic boarding school, Edna worked at a cigar stand at a downtown hotel her father managed; Parker sold fruit and vegetables at a nearby grocery.

The two fell in love, and married at a justice of the peace when the bride was only nineteen. Parker's mother never cared for Edna much, which Ford blamed on his grandmother's mistaken belief that she was secretly Catholic. But although Edna attended Catholic school, her parents only sent her there out of convenience (Edna's mom preferred that her daughter live elsewhere while a teenager?but when the depression hit, the family needed another paycheck).

Parker became a traveling salesman for The Faultless Starch Company, selling laundry starch to supermarkets, prisons, and even a leper colony. Before the couple had children, Edna accompanied Parker on his business trips, and according to Ford, they really enjoyed the restaurants, dancing, friends, and drinking throughout the south, especially in New Orleans.

Still, when Edna became pregnant, both parents-to-be felt incredible joy, and quickly settled into a new life in Jackson, Mississippi, chosen because it was located in the geographic center of Parker's sales territory. Edna stayed home with Richard, and Parker joined them on weekends.

Richard had difficulties in school, and after Parker had a heart attack when his son was only eight, Edna sent him to his grandparents' hotel for whole summers so she could drive the route for her husband. Ford's memoirs are introspective, and give us a good idea of what life was like in the 1940s and '50s for white families in the Deep South. They also share the experiences of a one-child family in an era when those were fairly uncommon.

Ford presents himself with all his faults and imperfections, and also shares some of his parents' failings. Yet what this joint memoir most celebrates is love, especially that lifelong bond between children and parents. Ford mentions that he would never have become a writer if his father had not died when Ford was still in high school. It's lucky for us that he did?and that he so eloquently brings his dead parents from obscurity to life upon the page.

Posted by Dory L. on July 10, 2017

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