

A CONVERSATION WITH NANCY PADDOCK

What inspired you to write *A Song at Twilight*?

Throughout my family's struggle with our parents' Alzheimer's, I spilled every day's experience into my journals. It was healing to put the pain I felt into words – to tell the truth, whether good or bad. This journal-writing cleared my mind so I could concentrate on my demanding teaching job. Eventually, with encouragement from others, I turned it all into a book.

What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

Because this book is a memoir, my main research was examining my own feelings and memories—especially those recorded in my journals. But I also relied on oral history interviews with my parents and sisters, read books and articles about aging and Alzheimer's, and found support in the spiritual writings of Dainin Katagiri and Lao Tzu.

How long did it take you to write *A Song at Twilight*?

I've kept journals since age 13. All through my parents' decline, which began in 1992 and ended with their deaths four days apart in 2001, I recorded events and emotions in order to clear my

mind and try to understand. In 2007, Blueroad Press included two chapters in *Stardust and Fate: The Blueroad Reader* and, in 2011, published *A Song at Twilight*. I can't say whether the book took 10 or 19 years, or even longer to write.

It's especially gratifying to learn that my book—which I believe to be honest and heartfelt—has helped some people deal with their own related problems.

What do you like most about your award-winning book?

I love Blueroad's cover and book design and am grateful for the chance to honor my parents and tell my family's story. It's especially gratifying to learn that my book—which I believe to be honest and heartfelt—has helped some people deal with their own related problems.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

My mother, who had dreamed of being a writer, gave me a diary when I was thirteen. I soon switched to thick spiral notebooks where I recorded events, dreams, problems, beliefs, poems,

everything. As an English major at the University of Minnesota, I was inspired especially by poet James Wright. Later I joined a supportive group of women writers and began submitting poems to literary magazines.

A woman from our group founded Vanilla Press and published my first book of poems: *A Dark Light* (1978). My husband, Joe, and I worked for arts and humanities organizations, doing residencies in Minnesota schools and elsewhere. Minnesota presses—Blueroad, Milkweed, Holy Cow! and Red Dragonfly—published our work. And, of course, the support and encouragement from friends, family and especially Joe, has been essential.

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24TH ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner

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A SONG AT TWILIGHT

of Alzheimer's and love

a memoir
Nancy Paddock

A Song at Twilight: of Alzheimer's and Love

by Nancy Paddock

BLUE ROAD PRESS

A Song at Twilight



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What is the importance of memory, and how does its loss or impairment change who we are, as well as what we can do?
3. How might we best prepare for our own aging?
4. In a situation in which we are essentially powerless, how can we learn to adjust, let go, and live fully in the moments we still have?
5. What qualities make a memoir a page-turner? Did you experience *A Song at Twilight* as a page-turner?
6. If you wrote a memoir about an aspect of your family's story, what would the focus and title be?
7. What role does humor play in the book? When is humor appropriate and helpful in dealing with a painful situation?
8. What risks does an author take in writing a memoir?
9. In what ways, if any, did *A Song at Twilight* provide you with insight, ideas or information for dealing with the illness of a family member or close friend?
10. The author is also a poet. Can you find examples of poetic-influence in the tone of the book, language used and/or style of writing?



SUMMARY

Nancy Paddock's memoir chronicles her parents' descent into Alzheimer's and the challenges and choices she and her sisters face while confronting this most baffling and tragic of diseases. Discovering that she cannot save them from their crumbling reality, Paddock works to rescue the details of their lives and seeks to retrieve a pattern from chaos—preserving, examining, and reliving the interwoven stories of lovers and family.

ABOUT NANCY PADDOCK



Nancy Paddock is the author of two poetry collections: Cooking with Pavarotti (2012) and Trust the Wild Heart (2006) which was a Minnesota Book Awards finalist. Her poems have also appeared in many journals and anthologies. Nancy lives and gardens in Litchfield with her husband, Joe. She writes and does other work in support of sustainable and environmentally sound agriculture.



Minnesota Department of
Education



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

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