



## **A Candle for My Mother: A Daughter's Journey toward Gratitude Inspired by the Stories of Lorraine E. Newton**

**Pamela L. Newton**

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*A Candle for My Mother is an inspiring family memoir that reflects on the virtues of travel, seeking new experiences, gratitude, and giving.*

In her captivating and thought-provoking memoir, *A Candle for My Mother*, Pamela Newton publishes her mother Lorraine's old travel letters and transcribed recordings alongside her own stories of traveling as a marketing executive for DreamWorks Animation. The book pays homage to Lorraine's enthusiasm for world discovery and the life lessons she passed on to Newton.

Chapters begin with Lorraine's recollections and end with Newton's reflections. The writing styles are vastly different, but the book relies on print type to signal which narrator is speaking: bold type for Lorraine, and regular for Newton.

Lorraine's travel adventures began in 1956, when her husband, Don, begins a work assignment in the Middle East. Ready for a change, Lorraine relocates to Iraq with the family's four young daughters to join Don. Lorraine's memories are transportive, filled with grand details of travel in the 1950s, when commercial international direct flights didn't exist and airplane travelers dressed their best, smoked cigarettes to their heart's contentment, and looked forward to tasty cuisine.

Lorraine's transcribed stories show her reaching out to her new community, forging family friendships that endured into the next generation. They also show how the family's lives shifted overnight after the Iraqi revolution, moving from comfortable days with household help, boarding school, and long holidays to living under house arrest and terror. Lorraine held herself together for the sake of her family, projecting calm and assurance; her transcribed stories reveal the turmoil and uncertainty she kept buried inside.

Newton reflects that she feels the deepest connection to her mother when she is traveling; she starts a personal tradition of lighting a candle for her mother in destinations the world over. Newton draws immaculate comparisons and parallels between decades-apart experiences, though only Lorraine's adventures necessitated a complete immersion in a foreign culture. Because of that, Lorraine is able to delve more deeply into the day-to-day living and lifestyle of the citizens in her locales and paint highly detailed pictures; Newton admits that her own itineraries read more like travel brochures.

Many of Newton's reflections center around work projects and complications. Invariably, work situations trigger memories about Lorraine; throughout, Newton comes to see her mother's wisdom and work anew. While relaxing on a train and being served a meal, Newton recalls Lorraine's stories of creating new recipes for her family and is overcome with gratitude; she barely restrains from hugging her server.

The dialogue and situations in Lorraine's narratives are perfectly selected. Each exchange highlights a turning point or something noteworthy in her journey. She bursts to life as a complex character as she relates interacting with

“houseboys” or how a family vacation had everything go wrong. Newton adds dimension with her own memories—such as Lorraine’s creative problem-solving, evinced when her mother marched her into the bathroom and cut off her hair for being “prissy.”

The narrative pattern reveals itself early on. As Lorraine’s story picks up, especially in the times of the revolution, her installments become truncated to fit with the preset pattern. Though they are beautifully written, some of Newton’s interjections read like intermissions to the main production. In contrast, Lorraine’s narratives shine.

*A Candle for My Mother* is a family memoir that reflects on the virtues of travel, seeking new experiences, gratitude, and giving, beckoning its audience to discover and connect to the world and its inhabitants themselves.

TANISHA RULE (August 17, 2018)

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