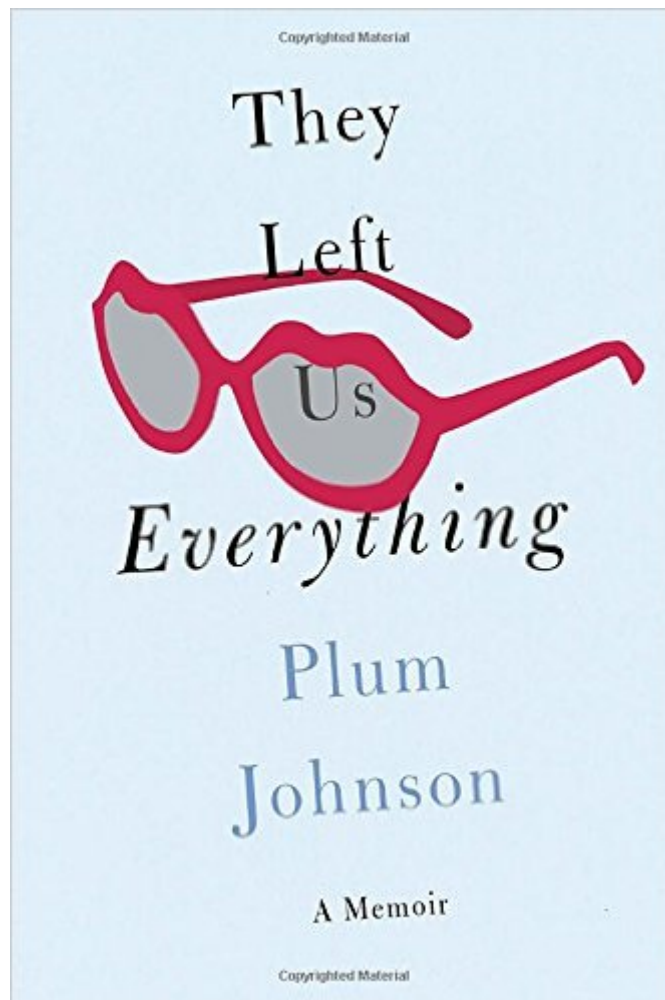


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# They Left Us Everything: A Memoir



## Synopsis

A warm, heartfelt memoir of family, loss, and a house jam-packed with decades of goods and memories. After almost twenty years of caring for elderly parents—first for their senile father, and then for their cantankerous ninety-three-year old mother—author Plum Johnson and her three younger brothers have finally fallen to their middle-aged knees with conflicted feelings of grief and relief. Now they must empty and sell the beloved family home, twenty-three rooms bulging with history, antiques, and oxygen tanks. Plum thought: How tough will that be? I know how to buy garbage bags. But the task turns out to be much harder and more rewarding than she ever imagined. Items from childhood trigger difficult memories of her eccentric family growing up in the 1950s and '60s, but unearthing new facts about her parents helps her reconcile those relationships, with a more accepting perspective about who they were and what they valued. *They Left Us Everything* is a funny, touching memoir about the importance of preserving family history to make sense of the past, and nurturing family bonds to safeguard the future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you have ever had to sort through the detritus left by those you love when they die or especially if you are an orphaned adult, you won't want to miss this memoir. Although Plum Johnson's family has more money, a more rarefied pedigree, and a much bigger family home than most people do, her struggle to deal with her aging mother, the disposition of family belongings, and the things she learned about herself and her family's interrelationships while she helped settle her mother's estate really resonate. Some things are apparently inescapable despite family income -- I was amused that

despite setting up an extremely complicated system to allow relatives to bid on favorite possessions far beyond those any ordinary family owns, relatives were still reduced to bargaining with each other after the official "sale" to get the things they really wanted -- just like any ordinary family. In the course of the memoir we learn about Plum's life and the stories of many of her family members. In some ways this was my favorite part of the memoir, as it puts everything else in context. The most evocative pieces of our childhoods are often the most desired booty even when they are technically worthless. The book recording her family's allowances was a perfect example of the kind of item that can cause hurt feelings between siblings when the solution they arrive at -- making copies-- is impossible to do (the paintings and cookie jar that were the prizes in one of my family's estate sale were not so neatly dealt with). The author proposes that rather than cleaning up our possessions so we don't leave a mess for our descendants, we should leave everything in situ so that they can learn about us and understand our lives.

As an only child who has been slowly emptying her family home and with a parent who has dementia, this book had enormous appeal even before starting it. Finding it is set less than an hour and a half away from me in Oakville Ontario, a town I'm very familiar with made it even more interesting. At the start of the book, the author's Mom is still alive and is sorely testing her patience. With her demanding nature and the lack of schedule of many elders, she doesn't quite understand why the author is none too happy ferrying her around and spending time acquiescing to her demands. Luckily the author's mother is in full control of her faculties, but like many Mother's and daughter's their relationship is not an easy one. She is quick to critique, and with a personality as big as a house, it makes it very hard to live with. Though the author does not live with her, she is responsible for much of her mother's other than day to day life demands. The author is the only daughter with 3 living brothers, and living local with a grown family and living alone makes her the perfect one to attend to her mother's needs and struggle to fill her own. I can relate. Which is why this book had so much appeal. I'm of a similar age, whose parents survived or served during WWII. There is an attraction with this generation for cooking with convenience items like soup and dried mixes, for decoration made of plastic and fake flowers and a general need to get more for less (quantity over quality) that drives our generation mad. Top that off with the opinion, that theirs is the right way to live you have a recipe for friction.

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