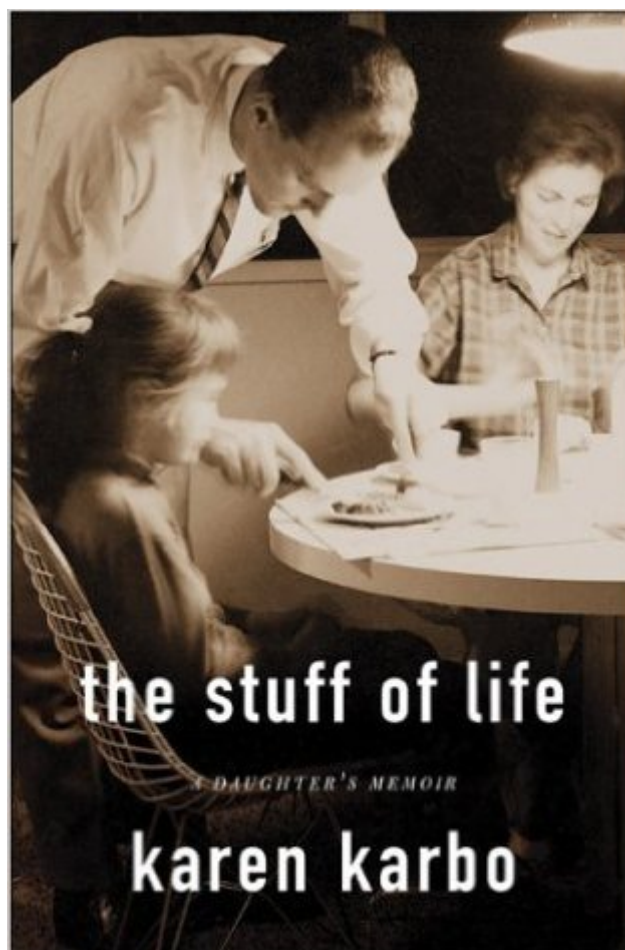


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The Stuff Of Life: A Daughter's Memoir



Synopsis

As a generation of baby boomers faces the aging of their parents, Karen Karbo's resonant new memoir tells the intimate story of one stoic father and wiseacre grown-up daughter navigating the last months of his life. When Karen Karbo's father, a charming, taciturn Clint Eastwood type who lives in a triple-wide in the Nevada desert, is diagnosed with lung cancer, his only daughter rises to the challenge of caring for him. Neither of them is exactly cut out for the job. Karen is a Doc Marten-sporting freelance writer who lives in Portland, Oregon, the primary breadwinner for a slightly chaotic blended family of five, who has always steered clear of the "helping professions." Dick Karbo, a retired industrial designer and card-carrying member of the NRA, is an equally reluctant patient. As Dick's disease progresses, Karen finds herself sometimes the responsible adult, sometimes a stubborn teenager all over again, by turns grief-stricken, rebellious, and amused by the grim ironies of the situation. In the end what father and daughter discover more than anything is the love and the toughness that makes them alike. Sensitive and ruefully funny, *The Stuff of Life* invites you into a family as complicated and real as your own, capturing a moment filled with all the sadness and warmth of adult life.

Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Bloomsbury USA (October 1, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1582341834

ISBN-13: 978-1582341835

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 1.1 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (7 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #3,031,197 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #92 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Diseases & Physical Ailments > Cancer > Lung Cancer](#) #4457 in [Books > Self-Help > Death & Grief > Grief & Bereavement](#) #26148 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Women](#)

Customer Reviews

Karen did a beautiful job of making me laugh while I cringed. I got this book because I am currently in her shoes with my own dad--our shoes are different sizes but the path is the same. I was helped knowing her experience, knowing her thoughts, feelings, reactions and how she coped with not

knowing. Her humor touched me deeply and I felt so grateful that there is also room to laugh during this challenge of life and death. I highly recommend this book to any adult child who chooses to courageously face and honor their parent during their final chapter. I have felt so alone at times but have also felt helped by Karbo's generous contribution for those of us who follow in her footsteps. She has helped me not to judge myself and to open more softly to accepting the reality that one of my loved ones is in the midst of his final times here and compassion for self and others truly connects and brings a crazy kind of peace. Thank you Karen.

Here's what is so terrific about this book: 1) It satisfies your morbid curiosity about how death really happens, eg "I didn't know how long a body could hang on, how dying can be imminent for days and days and days," a truth nobody ever tells you; 2) it satisfies your morbid curiosity about how other respectable competent people actually get through the deaths of their loved ones and how they fall apart a bit (eg don't actually want to hear details about their bowel movements). 3) It's tragic AND funny, often at the same time, as when Karbo describes her cancer-and-chemo ravaged father coughing into a square of kleenex and folding it into ever tinier and tinier squares and then dropping it into a plastic bag, or rewards himself by having a SINGLE JELLY BEAN FOR DESSERT, or counts the number of kibbles he gives his dog, 23 every day. We get this great clear sense of him as a bit exasperating in his obsessive-compulsivity but also as a meticulous and a profoundly decent and moral human being, a duality which helps those of us with gigantically ambivalent feelings about our own parents. Along the way Karbo tells similarly horrible/funny stories about the lives and deaths of other luminaries in her life like her mother (brain cancer), stepsister (suicide), dog (euthanasia). 4) There is genuine suspense about what happens next: even though we ultimately know "how it ends," we don't know HOW it ends, and in fact there is a mystery about Karbo's actual parentage which gets revealed at the end. 5) The best part, though, is that you end up gobbling the book just waiting to see how Karbo is going to say stuff. For example that her father's nurse's real name, Sandra Nightingale, is so unlikely that it "must be her nom de nurse." Or that her grim and determined mother, just before dying when Karbo was a bewildered 16, strategized with Karbo about her college wardrobe, "not unlike a general discussing battle plans with his immediate subordinate." Or that on his deathbed her father "stares up at the ceiling. He looks hypnotized, but at the same time preoccupied, as if he's doing a difficult math problem in his head." This writing captures important stuff, in fact the stuff of life and death. This is good writing and this is a good, even a great, book.

When my sister passed this book on to me I thought I'd never read it. Like I want to read about someone's father dying of lung cancer? It turns out I read *The Stuff of Life* in about two sittings. This compulsively readable memoir is funny and wise and has a lot to say about how important it is to just be yourself, and do what you can for the people you love. It debunks the myth that in order to be a caregiver you have to have a Florence Nightengale-type personality. It's NOT about death, but about how we live. It's about the mess of life. I thought it was way better than *Tuesdays with Morrie*, because it was more real.

I work for a hospice and this book was quite informative in many ways. Including: father/daughter relationships, lung CA, explanation on how it can effect someone and taking care of a loved one at home. I was surprised by something that is disclosed in the book) and taken slightly aback but I was motivated to read more!

This is a fantastic read about dealing with the death of the author's father. Ms. Karbo writes in a manner that is both witty and poignant.

Karen Karbo got me in the first chapter and kept me. It was recommended by a friend and I'm glad I took her advice to read Karbo's book.

Very good heartwarming book. Really enjoyed the characters, and the writers perception of events.

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