

## Book Review

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# Releasing the Butterfly: A Love Affair in Four Acts by Max Sherman, 2020, 280 pp.

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*Releasing the Butterfly* (RTB) is fundamentally one of the most beautifully written love stories ever told. RTB is a journey for the reader that begins with Max Sherman's strong, youthful crush on Gene Alice, the love of his life, a long courtship, marriage, the highs and lows of an enduring relationship, friendship, careers, and ultimately to the test of true love and commitment following Gene Alice's diagnosis of early onset dementia, leading to Alzheimer's disease where Max became a stranger to the love of his life.

RTB is a testament to Gene Alice's strong will, independence, and determination. It is a celebration of fierce womanhood, during an era where that was not readily acknowledged or accepted. Max credits Gene Alice's independent, intellectual, and curious spirit throughout the book, and, in fact, he embraced and encouraged that in Gene Alice. Gene Alice maintained her own personal identity throughout their very public facing marriage, given that Max maintained a very high-profile political office and career.

In RTB, Max openly shares his devastation, struggle, fear, and reality of not physically losing Gene Alice, but losing her to another world, in the grip of dementia and Alzheimer's, where not only was he no longer known or recognized, but where he felt helpless in protecting and caring for his vibrant, independent, strong-willed, beautiful wife and best friend. Max found himself on a new journey of trying to navigate this horrible disease, learning how best to communicate, understand, and care for Gene Alice, and, most importantly, ensure her safety; now a caregiver with no guidebook.

Max beautifully details his journey through the many dark moments, experiences, and learnings in dealing with the required caregiving associated with

dementia and Alzheimer's, his impenetrable love for Gene Alice never diminished in any way. In fact, he worked tirelessly, with the caregivers in the facility, where Gene Alice was ultimately placed, to ensure care that would preserve Gene Alice's fierce independence. Caregiving for an individual afflicted with dementia and Alzheimer's is a delicate and frustrating process. Max found himself searching for answers and navigating the unknown<sup>3/4</sup>a new world for Max who was, more often than not, the "go-to" man for solutions throughout his remarkable career as a public servant. Max learned to rely on the advice and expertise of those with deep experience, always with Gene Alice's best interest and care front and center.

As a reader of RTB, and with my own Mother afflicted with dementia/Alzheimer's, I was moved to tears at times as I paged through Max and Gene Alice's journey. Dealing with this horrible disease is not only painful and frustrating, but a process of slow grief, for all caregivers, family, and friends. It is a cruel disease, robbing the afflicted of dignity, and most importantly, memories. It requires a different kind of patient love—a love where one must navigate and adjust differently day to day, never knowing what to expect and learning not to internalize the void stares, the lack of remembering (especially names), the unlearning of basic day to day functions, and the inability to communicate.

What profoundly struck me in reading RTB was not only Gene Alice's continued, fierce determination at life (despite her affliction), but Max's unwavering love and commitment to Gene Alice that was no different than the first time he laid eyes on her and decided that she was the one for him for the rest of his life. RTB is a story of prevailing love.

I am blessed and honored to call Max Sherman a friend. While I have never met Gene Alice, personally, Max introduced us to Gene Alice in RTB making her so “real-life” that you knew her even though never meeting her in person. This is a true measure of Max’s enduring love for Gene Alice and also his commitment to her, in telling this story, to ensure that she is remembered in the way that Gene Alice would want to be remembered and how Gene Alice lived her life to the fullest.

Thank you to Max Sherman for your vulnerability and willingness to share such an incredible journey.

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