
For *Not for Nothing* Author, Jersey Shore Plays Supporting Role in Life Story

Glimpses Into a Jersey Girlhood

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The magic of Kathy Curto's memoir, *Not for Nothing*, set in Ocean County, is the way her narrative voice starts as that of a little girl, dancing on the countertop to amuse her dad's customers at their family-run gas station and body shop, and matures over the course of 150 pages to that of a young woman, discovering her desires and seeking answers to her father's oft-posed question "Who do you think you are?"

The reader is along for the journey of growing up with her.

"I wanted the feel of the book to be immediate,"

Curto said of why she chose that voice.

Most of the storytelling is set in the Toms River area, but when her parents reunited after a separation, the family relocated to Ship Bottom. "So much water, and that felt good," she writes in the chapter called "21st Street." "I heard someone say that ocean was just up the street. That we could walk there. The house was in between the bay and ocean and I could walk to both. This helped. I'm not even sure why but knowing water is all around helped."

On the Island is where she experiences her first kiss, her first inkling of wanting to be "cool." "Some girls in my class at Ethel Jacobsen Elementary School were going on and on about how they hate crabbing docks because of all the splinters you get and because the way the water sometimes splashes up and gets you in the eye after boats pass by and make big waves. Then they started talking about how barnacles give them the willies. Not me."

But for every fond recollection of Italian family meals and summer nights, there is very real heartache, too: her parents' fights, or "messes" as she calls them; her older brother's struggles with addiction, recovery and relapse; the way her father's sharp eyes cut into her like "a bad paper cut times fifty."

Short chapters keep the story galloping along, each one standing on its own as a memory, a vignette that serves to represent the bigger picture.

Curto explained she is "most comfortable writing short nonfiction pieces, some flash-type (that's why I chose 'glimpses' in the subtitle) and pieces that are personal-essay-flavored. I experiment and play around in other genres and forms sometimes but naturally land back in this area, at least for now."

The book took a long time to come together, she said. "And now, looking back, I think I needed every second of that time. I didn't know I was starting a book when I wrote the first chapter."

The project initially grew out of a writing workshop she attended in 2005, by which point both of her parents had passed away. Revisiting her childhood became a way to keep them alive and present in her life. "I carried the work and the stories and the revisions and the musings with me in and out of various aspects of my creative, professional and personal lives for over a decade."

Curto explained growing up in a blue-collar household influenced her values and outlook, and in the process of reflecting and writing on her youth, she has questioned how the term "blue collar" is defined today and what it means. "I also think this writing has made me consider the great value of undervalued work, and the stigma attached to it sometimes, particularly when the work is dirty in nature."

The memoir, published by Bordighera Press, was released Dec. 11.

"I am still experiencing lots of emotions," Curto said. "Like any other passage in life, it sort of depends on the day, sometimes the moment. I go from feeling exhilarated to scared to naked to humbled. And talking to readers is a gift, really, so I enjoy hearing their questions and learning about the scenes they

relate to or identify with.”

Does she ever answer the question of who she thinks she is?

“Some days the answer is crystal clear and other days it’s not. I love coming-of-age stories, but I am realizing more and more that we really never stop coming of age.”

Visit kathycurto.com to find out where to buy *Not for Nothing*.

— **Victoria Ford**

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