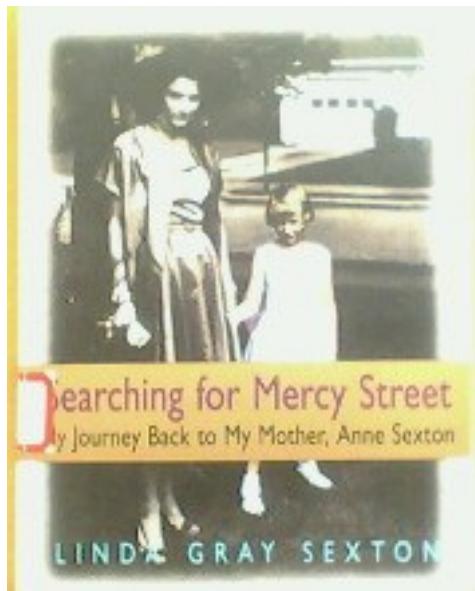


Searching for Mercy Street



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Mother, are you listening? This is what I have seen and heard and learned. I am the forty-year old Linda and I am ready to speak back. It has taken twenty years for Linda Gray Sexton to address these words to her mother, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Anne Sexton, who committed suicide on October 4, 1974. Anne Sexton's chronic mental illness was the anguished center of her family's life. While there were wonderful days, long afternoons spent discussing books, poems, and feelings - watching her grow excited when one of my lines pleased her filled me with a shy ecstasy - the gentle moments were hard to remember. Too often, Anne's outrageous behavior made her children cower in fear for the stability of their family. The bond between mother and daughter was never easy or clear. As a child, Linda was sent away from home for months - caring for Linda overwhelmed Anne, who confessed to having murderous impulses toward her daughter. Later, Anne would suffocate Linda with a capricious

possessiveness Linda would learn to recognize as psychological and sexual abuse. I made myself numb, made my body like a stone in exchange for my mother's love. Linda eventually realized she had to break from her mother's toxic embrace in order to save herself. Searching for Mercy Street is the product of an arduous emotional and intellectual journey of two decades, during which Linda Gray Sexton became an adult and a mother and discovered her own lyrical voice as a novelist; only to find herself fighting the same demons of depression she had watched control her mother. Was I turning into her? I wondered with a flat sort of horror. Had I become "her kind"? Searching for Mercy Street is a story with which every mother and daughter will identify, because Linda Gray Sexton writes with profound honesty about this most formative of all relationships: our first. This daughter's memoir provides uniquely personal insights that no biographer or critic has - or could - have offered into the life of

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