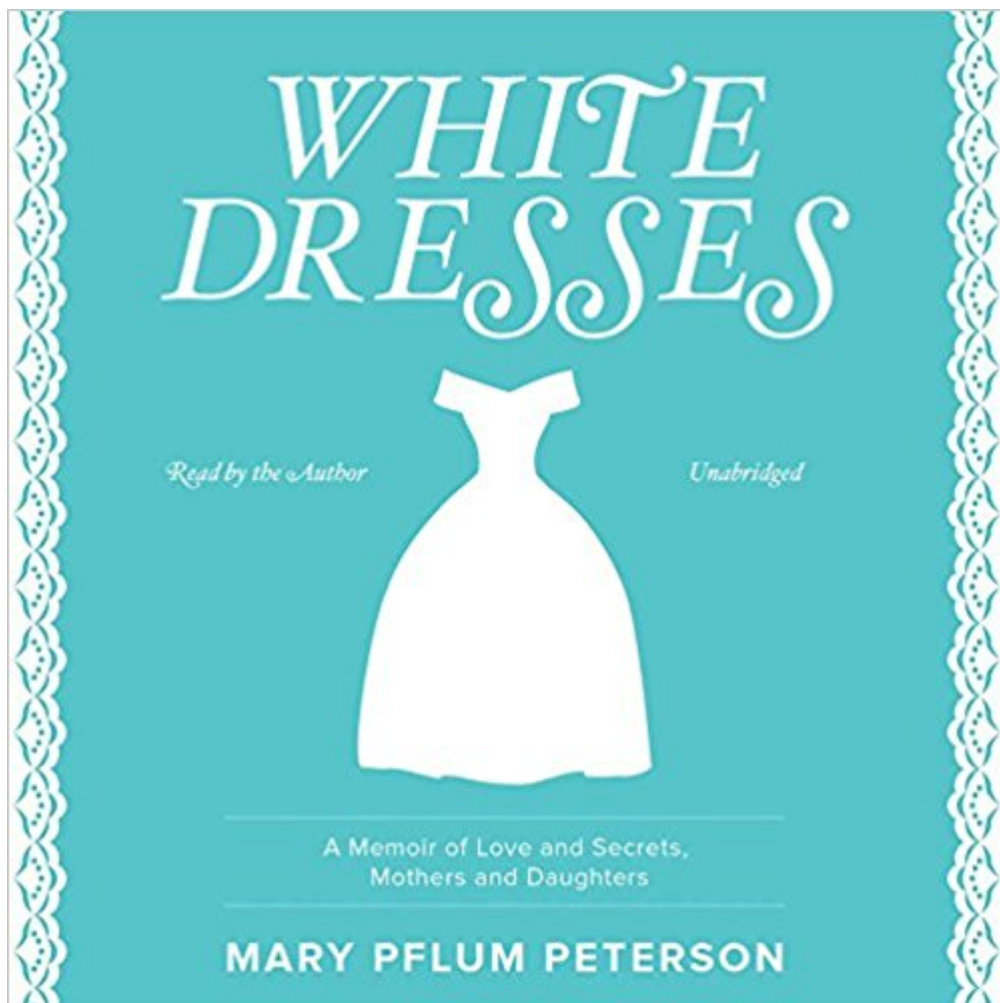




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# White Dresses: A Memoir Of Love And Secrets, Mothers And Daughters



## Synopsis

[\*Read by the author - Mary Pflum Peterson] In this riveting, poignant memoir of three generations of women and the white dresses that adorned them, Emmy Award-winning television producer Mary Pflum Peterson recounts a journey through loss, redemption, and her battle to rescue her mother from compulsive hoarding. As a successful television journalist at Good Morning America, Mary Pflum is known as a polished and highly organized producer. It's a persona at odds with her tortured childhood, where she watched her emotionally vulnerable mother fill their house with teetering piles of assorted "treasures." But one thing has always united mother and daughter: their love of white dresses. From the dress worn by Mary's mother when she became a nun and married Jesus, to the wedding gown she donned years later, to the special nightshirts she gifted Mary after the birth of her children, to graduation dresses and christening gowns, these white dresses embodied hope and new beginnings. After her mother's sudden death in 2010, Mary dug deep to understand the events that led to Anne's unraveling. At twenty-one, Anne entered a convent and committed to a life of prayer and helping others. But lengthy periods of enforced fasting, isolation from her beloved students, and constant humiliation eventually drove her to flee the convent almost a decade later. Hoping to find new purpose as a wife and mother, Anne instead married an abusive, closeted gay man -- their eventual divorce another sign of her failure. Anne retreated into chaos. By the time Mary was ten, their house was cluttered with broken appliances and stacks of unopened mail. Anne promised but failed to clean up for Mary's high school graduation party, where she was being honored as her school's valedictorian, causing Anne's perfectionist daughter's fear and shame to grow in tandem with the heaps upon heaps of junk. In spite of everything, their bond endured. Through the white dresses, pivotal events in their lives were celebrated - even as Mary tried in vain to save Anne from herself. Unflinchingly honest, insightful, and compelling, *White Dresses* is a beautiful, powerful story -- and a reminder of the unbreakable bonds between mothers and daughters.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Peterson's generous homage to her mother offers an empathetic look at a baffling, frustrating mental illness. A candid, moving memoir about the many complexities of family." --Kirkus Reviews

A poignant memoir of three generations of women and the white dresses that adorned them. As a successful journalist at Good Morning America, Mary Pflum Peterson's persona is at odds with her complicated childhood, where she watched her brilliant yet emotionally vulnerable mother, Anne, unravel before her eyes. But their love of white dresses always united them—from their baptism dresses to their wedding gowns, white dresses embodied hope and new beginnings. After her mother's sudden death, Mary dug deep to understand the events that led to Anne's breakdown. At twenty-one, Anne entered a convent, but lengthy periods of enforced fasting, isolation, and constant humiliation drove her to flee almost a decade later. Hoping to find new purpose as a wife and mother, she married, and was devastated when Mary's father revealed himself to be gay. Anne retreated into chaos. By the time Mary was ten, their house was cluttered with broken appliances, stacks of mail, and teetering piles of assorted "treasures." But in spite of everything, their bond endured. Through the white dresses, pivotal events in their lives were celebrated, marking the journey through loss and redemption as Mary tried to save Anne from herself. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

I loved all the background history of Mary's family. I am a Hoarder and understand a good amount of the psychology behind it. The ones closest to a Hoarder, especially their children, seldom really understand the root of the problem or the attachment to so much 'stuff'! Mary does an excellent job of documenting her Mother Ann's past and her gradual decline into hoarding. A frequent comment is "If you would just let us help and get rid of all this stuff you would feel so much better." But we don't. It isn't impossible to overcome but those who treat hoarding say it is one of the most persistent addictions. In spite of Mary's great challenges growing up, she has been very blessed to experience many varied opportunities throughout her life including having children and most important a love of

her life who loves her, allows her to be who she is, and gets her! As for Ann? Her Spirit is amongst loved ones and is free at last.

Although I'm not a Catholic, I was thoroughly entranced by this story of 2 women whose lives were so shaped by religion. Mary Pflum Peterson is an excellent storyteller. She begins her narrative searching her recently deceased mother's home for the touchstones of her life - white dresses. The complication is that Mary's mother Anne was a hoarder. After that early revelation, the author begins a shocking backstory that yields understanding of Anne's strange compulsion. This was a different kind of book from those I usually read, but it more than held my interest and I strongly recommend "White Dresses" to anyone who appreciates good writing, a fascinating biography and strong character development.

I'm not sure what prompted me to purchase this in the first place but it turned out to be one of my favorite books in a while. It is beautifully written, covering three generations of remarkable women who lived their lives with various levels of success and happiness, often because of the men they married. The author did a wonderful job of lovingly chronicling the life of her mother and what led to her hoarding and sad and debilitating later years. Really an interesting, well written and compassionate book illustrating the progress women have made in being able to make choices in their lives.

This memoir was somewhat enjoyable, but like other reviewers, I felt that the style of writing changed as the story progressed. I kept waiting for the story to get to the interesting part, but that never really happened. We start with the narrator/author in the present day, but then the book abruptly takes us to the past. We go from the lives of the grandparents, through the mother's life, to the narrator's, and on to the mother's death. But...there was something missing. I think there were too many facts, not enough emotions. I never empathized with the narrator/author. I tried to understand where she was coming from, but she held too much back, emotions wise. The results were a narrator that often came across as selfish. The author had a brother, but we only hear about him as a child and at the end of the book, after the mother's death. Why did the author's deadbeat dad get so much time on the page, yet her brother got almost no mention? Were the siblings so estranged that the author glossed over her own brother's existence? That's the problem with writing a memoir verses fiction. The author only knows her side of things, her point of view, yet she has attempted to write what other family member were thinking in the past. It took away from the story,

the author's story. Instead of empathy with the author, I was annoyed with her. Too much poor me, not enough emotion. Too much telling, not enough showing. I know it takes guts to allow strangers into your personal life, but if you're going to do so, do it all the way or not at all. I never felt sad when anything bad happened to any of the characters, no tears, nothing. I have experience with hoarders, so maybe that came into play while reading. The mother's hoarding didn't come across as shocking. The author acting like a robot, yeah...that was annoying. Unfortunately, the author wrote herself as a cold, insensitive person. Maybe if she'd dug a little deeper, she could have allowed the readers to mourn WITH her. As this story stands, it just feels flat. Instead of feeling sorry for the author, I'm disappointed in her. It's a shame someone didn't say something to the author BEFORE this book was published. The author obviously has great writing skills, but she didn't seem to be able to separate the character of herself from her actual self. Perhaps this would account for the lack of emotional detail.

Really interesting story and well told. Mary loves her mother in an intense and heart warming way and writes to understand, to explain to better know what happened to both her mother and herself. Plus, Mary has a really interesting life that is enjoyable to learn about. And hoarding is just such a weird mental illness - one we know so little about. And she begins to illuminate what it was like to discover it within her mother.

ALL the stars. This was a compelling read and a frank, fresh look at a REAL mother-daughter dynamic. Ms. Peterson was on target with her candid assessment of her mother as a flawed, complicated, layered human being but one who was worthy of great love and devotion. May all mother-daughter memoirs take a cue from her and present believable pictures of actual people in a way that tells the truth but does not marinate in anger and aggression. I loved this book.

Fantastic read! So very written and truly captures the life of a woman who has gone thru tremendous heartache at every turn in her road. The book also captures the true love Anne had for those who were important to her and how she bore their feelings more than they could understand. Her latter episodes of hording can never be fully analyzed but appears, in my opinion, as something associated with her continued loss of all that was so important to her in earlier life.

White Dresses is a generational novel that unravels from the significance of events that four related women experience. The dresses signify major life changing moments that produce the next

daughters and their families. The family matriarchs each hand down strong faith for their Catholic upbringings, even in the wake of so many changes of times, women, the Catholic Church and families. 4 stars

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