

### Book Reviews

social policy to focus her narrative and research questions. She identifies the need to balance the private endeavour of cultivating a family and the use of public support that is available—although less available to children with more severe disabilities. She argues that a sense of community—whether family-based, neighbourhood-based, or culturally-based—must complement society’s limited public resources.

A true ethnographic study, *Battle Cries* identifies essential patterns of acceptance, understanding, and growth. Edelson’s heartfelt book is written specifically for families of children with disabilities and those professionals who work directly with them.

## **Afraid of the Day: A Daughter’s Journey**

Nancy Graham.  
Toronto: Women’s Press, 2003.

### **Reviewed by Nancy Gerber**

Nancy Graham’s unflinching account of surviving her mother’s depression opens with an epigraph from Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother*: “My mother died the moment I was born, and so for the whole of my life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity.” This unwelcome delivery into loss and pain also describes Graham’s experience: for three months after her birth, on 17 March 1962, her mother was hospitalized for severe postpartum depression that recurred yearly for 20 years.

Martha Bonner, Graham’s mother, was a lively young woman with many friends and interests. Born in 1930 in Hamilton, Ontario, where Graham also spent her youth, Bonner left high school at the age of 16 to help support her family and was working in the accounts department at Hydro Electric when she was introduced to her future husband, Henry Reid, on a blind date. Married in 1958, the couple moved to a bungalow in a neighbourhood of the city where farm fields and apple orchards once stood. Thus far, the story is familiar as the narrative of a young, energetic couple married during the post-war boom, eager for a family and their future. Just a few years later, as Bonner sinks deeper and deeper into depression, the familiar outlines of a suburban childhood are ruptured as Graham enters the terrifying world of mental illness and becomes mother and caregiver to her own mother.

Graham’s narrative veers between the nightmare of psychiatric hospitals and the nightmare of home, where her mother perpetually teeters on the verge of incapacitating depressions. In spite of the considerable grief she feels when

she visits her mother in hospital, a reader senses her relief at no longer being responsible for her mother's safety and well-being. At home, Graham becomes exquisitely attuned to minutest shifts in her mother's mood and appearance: a dullness in gaze and increasing lethargy frequently signal the onset of another depressive episode. When depression strikes, Bonner takes to her bed, a shell of a woman unable to eat, dress, or bathe, let alone care for her children or enjoy familial celebrations such as Christmas and birthdays. The unpredictability of these episodes and the disruption that ensues—children who must be shuttled back and forth to relatives, an anxious father performing the dual roles of family caregiver and wage earner—are exacerbated by the father's volatile temper and frequent arguing and constant tension between the two parents. The reader empathizes with Graham when she laments she has a “mother like no other”—a mother who cannot enjoy vacations, her children's achievements, the company of loving friends and family—a woman for whom the most ordinary pleasures—kissing her children goodbye, going for a walk—demand an energy that is just not available.

As is often the case in narratives of childhood, the earliest passages are the most heartbreaking. Here is a prose-poem where Graham imagines her mother receiving her first electroshock treatment, in December 1962 when Graham was an infant, before the onset of awareness and memory: “a needle plunges into a thread-like vein, bleeding muscle relaxant into her body ... melancholy eyes staring up in fear of the unknown ... her body surrenders to crudely choreographed spasms ... eyes screaming in shocked white silence” (34). Such passages resonate with Jo Malin's theory in *The Voice of the Mother* that women's autobiographies often contain an “intertext,” an embedded maternal narrative that is a biography of the writer/daughter's mother (1).

Not surprisingly, Graham succumbed to depression in her mid-teens, which she sought to medicate by drinking, creating a vicious cycle that deepened her dependency. In spite of her dependence on alcohol, she was able to work part-time and graduate with honours from McMaster University, demonstrating resilience and ambition she cannot acknowledge. By the time her mother is stabilized on lithium when Graham is in her early 20s, the daughter's struggles with alcohol and self-esteem increase. She develops a raging case of bulimia. She tries to protect family members from knowing she is gay, fearing this will cause her mother to relapse. She moves from job to job, trying to hide her burgeoning depression from concerned friends and colleagues. While she seeks help from therapists, she is unable to find respite from the depression that dominates her existence.

Her slow journey toward recovery begins when she leaves the pressures of an office job for a life more conducive to writing. The acceptance of her prose into a selective program which connects her with an esteemed author, entry into therapy with a compassionate psychiatrist, her reconnection with an inspirational high school English teacher—all of whom are women—provide her with the nurturing she was denied as a child. Gradually she learns not to

blame herself for her mother's illness and to appreciate the ways in which she and her mother are both alike and different.

Painfully honest in its depiction of insidious symptoms such as hopelessness and self-punishment, Graham's memoir is an important addition to the literature of depression and an eloquent reminder of how rupture to early mother-daughter bonding has lifelong consequences.

## **From Work-Family Balance to Work-Family Interaction: *Changing the Metaphor***

Diane F. Halpern and Susan Elaine Murphy, eds.  
Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005.

### **Book Reviewed by Justyna Sempruch**

In this collection of research studies, Diane Halpern and Susan Murphy are on a revolutionary mission to rewrite the work-life conflict into a dynamic vision of work-family interaction. Embracing research trends, potential challenges, and best practice models across employment strategies and family arrangements, they seek to foster change.

Working parents are often stressed and tired, but so are stay-at-home parents and working adults without children or other care responsibilities. In fact, current research does not support traditional assumptions about happy and relaxed stay-at-home mothers. Working women are less depressed and generally healthier and better integrated in social dimensions of life. Parents in low-paid jobs with high work demand and little control over their work patterns, however, often experience stress. Hence, Halpern and Murphy link the phenomenon of burnout to the social environment and encourage companies and organizations to invest in family friendly work policies.

Boundaries between paid work and family life have always intersected, but in light of the increasing precariousness and instability of employment, the organizational context and culture of the workplace are of crucial importance to working parents. The issues driving incompatibility between work and home make the most attractive employees less interested in professional advancement and, for the obvious reasons of security and comfort, more committed to their families.

As Halpern and Murphy show, to understand how employees respond to work-life demands we need a broad picture of the causes of work-life conflict. Such factors as cultural diversity, race, and individual differences in personality, as well as life style and resources, often determine how two individuals react to the same stressor or the same occurrences of conflict. Non-white employees