

(21). This bit of information is enough to set a form to the story, to foreshadow what may come. The story evokes the mythic tale of Ariel, and the Tempest true, harking back not only to modern and post-modern notions of parenthood, but also making references to the mythical, evoking the collective unconscious and the primordial; tying mothers to children in a generational tapestry. In many ways, while the stories are creative and about ordinary and extraordinary things, they are also in their own ways, ideas about writing we can wrap our heads around and “hold in our hands.”

In some of the stories, we get a sense of claustrophobia, a sense that words will not do, that they are highly ambiguous oracles in a culture where it is quite difficult to express emotions. Therefore, the author’s language is often simple and direct, naming and labeling as if a mother to a child in the realm of the Real, before the level of the Symbolic, and before ordinary language even entered the space between mother and infant.

The title story, “What We Hold in Our Hands” is a well-written bundle of self-reflexivity. The story itself is about the art and practice of telling stories. It pulls into itself notions of juvenilia, as if the story could have been published before the speaker was a storyteller herself. It also pulls on the pathos of the inter-generational and the importance of the oral tradition as well as the written artifacts and visual documents and acumens of familial life. For instance, the speaker accuses her grandmother, “Whenever Grandpa started to tell me a story, even stories about his childhood, you’d always ask me to help with some chore. Like the laundry” (81). The story itself is the speak-act-utterance, showing without telling the reader what we should value, and that is how Aubrey works her magic.

The Goodbye Year: Wisdom and Culinary Therapy to Survive Your Child’s Senior Year of High School (and Reclaim the You of You)

Toni Piccinini
Berkeley: Seal Press, 2013

REVIEWED BY MAYA E. BHAVE

Toni Piccinini is a former restaurant worker and owner turned cooking class extraordinaire, who has written an amusing self-help book about the intersection of motherhood, cooking, and the college search process for her high-school aged children. I expected I would read, and effortlessly reproduce, each

monthly recipe, savoring each morsel until I had consumed all of her wisdom on how to overcome, nay conquer, the struggles, stressors, and volatile college application process. It would be Chaucer meets Childs! I read the book in one day, but I have yet to make one of her meals and by the second month of my son's senior year I felt like a failure; frustrated with my teenage son, yet strangely loving him more intensely by the day. I went back to Piccinini's book, and realized that was what she wanted me to learn all along—I could feel lost and yet still come out learning much about myself.

Piccinini begins with the premise that for most mothers senior year is the transparent period by which we become cognizant that time and aging have indeed caught up with us. These watershed junctures leave us feeling nostalgic, and at times panicked, about what lays ahead for our kids, and most importantly, ourselves. For 20 years we mothered the ship (5) of our families and now are about to change course and we wonder about our purpose. Reassuringly she argues that as terrifying as it feels to let go, this process can be a gift, allowing new (painful) growth that results in the possibility of reclaiming a new identity as a woman (27).

I found her month-by-month analysis of the college search process valuable and the accompanying seasonal recipes laudable, but the "to do" lists seem simplistic and often out of place. The thoughtful analysis of how motherhood is tied to our broader social identities is deftly accomplished. She enables the reader to think about our future motherhood and how we might mother without our children nearby, or as she puts it, what happens when we are "no longer the most benevolent queen in the kingdom of my family?" (93). She claims that our two most common responses are keeping uber-busy and worrying. The paradox is that our children are living in a moment of now, as they can't see what is beyond the next dance, soccer game, or weekend party.

I cried a few times, yet laughed much more often whilst reading about diets, denial and menopause, kids and curfews, mother as flight attendant (putting on our own masks before helping others), and her commentary on men and their naked middle-age bodies. I felt as though Piccinini had moved into our house, and had overtaken my body! With each page, I realized I wasn't alone or crazy, and would eventually find my inner courage. She notes that as our kids need acceptance of their final year a bit at a time, we too need the same and subsequently can begin to accept who we are, buried beneath our mothering facades.

She reminisces at the end of her book at old pictures of where we (and our children) have been; eking out the memories, those warm, pivotal moments, like glancing at a dusty old yearbook. The process of looking back isn't because we are searching for something long gone, but to see that we have really survived. Ironically I learned that my son's senior year was not about him