

***Letters Between Us***

Linda Rader Overman  
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Reviewed by Paige Lovitt for Reader Views (6/08)

Thirty-nine-year-old Laura is not having an easy time in her life right now. Her mother is suffering from dementia and her once happy marriage is on the rocks. Life has definitely gotten in the way of her happiness. Totally destroying any sense of contentment, she gets a telephone call notifying her that Katharine, her best friend since childhood, has been found dead. Her body was discovered dumped in a trash bin after she disappeared while on a picnic outing for hospital psychiatric patients.

Putting her life on hold, Laura goes to Katharine's funeral. Afterwards, she begins going through a box of diaries and letters from Katharine's life. Combining them with her personal collection, she takes refuge in a hotel room, away from everybody, and begins reading. As she reads, she also remembers. This novel is written about the information in those diaries and the letters that were written between the girls starting twenty-six years ago. The current time in this story is 1989. Laura tells her story to us through her current journal writings.

Neither one of them had a very stable upbringing, yet it was Laura who was both promiscuous and heavily involved in experimentation with drugs and alcohol. Katharine, in spite of her mental health issues, was more reserved and restrained. Katharine's first hospitalization in a mental health facility began in 1969. Being a child of alcoholic parents and a father that was abusive and unemployed left a huge scar on her psyche. As she grew into adulthood, her psychosis worsened. Towards the end, her psychotic behavior was turning her into a person that Laura had trouble recognizing as her friend.

As Laura looks back over the years, she sees clues about Katharine's life that she missed while knowing her. This is also the first time that she has stopped and taken the time to evaluate her own life. Laura's young adulthood was more focused on sex, drugs and alcohol than self-examination. Now that she is taking time, she also finds clues as to when things started happening in her own life, such as when her marriage died. It also hits her hard that these mementos are the end of her memories with her dear friend. With Katharine gone, there will not be any new memories to make.

"Letters Between Us" is one of those books that leaves you sitting quietly and contemplatively after you are done reading it. Initially, all that I could say about the novel was, "Wow." This is definitely one of the most realistic fictional stories that I have ever read. As a matter of fact, the story was so real to me, that while I was reading it, I kept checking the category it was listed under to make sure that it really was a fictional story. Linda Rader Overman has such a talent with words. Using similes and metaphors she does a wonderful job of imparting a visual picture over everything, including emotions. Part of me feels like I just finished watching a movie, instead of having read a book. This novel is about looking back and contemplating life, not death.