



Surviving Ophelia: Mothers Share Their Wisdom in Navigating the Tumultuous Teenage Years

By Cheryl Dellasega

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Why are the teen years fraught with crisis for so many girls? Why do so many mother-daughter relationships deteriorate drastically at this time? When her own teenage daughter began to spiral out of control, therapist Cheryl Dellasega, Ph.D., launched a nationwide search to find answers—and hope. In this inspiring, compassionate book, Dellasega shares the strength and the wisdom of mothers who have seen their daughters through the tumult of adolescence.

Drawing on the experiences of scores of mothers and daughters, Dellasega takes a hard look at the lives of girls in crisis—once happy, carefree children who are now struggling with eating disorders, unplanned pregnancies, substance abuse, and severe mental problems. These are stories of girls on the edge, and mothers who are trying everything to save them. Yet even in the most desperate situations, Dellasega hears the same clear message: the key to survival is the support and the understanding of others going through the same thing.

Surviving Ophelia is a book that provides the community that mothers of troubled teenage girls need more than anything. Powerful and heartfelt, this book captures both the pain and the strength of mothers who are living with the daily challenge of raising teenage daughters today.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Surviving Ophelia by Cheryl Dellasega, a clinician at Penn State's College of Medicine and a mother of three, provides a community for mothers who, like she, have the often bewildering and unnerving task of raising a teenage girl (an Ophelia) in trouble. By describing her own heartbreaking experience and compiling the stories and poems of hundreds of mothers across the country, Dellasega paints a picture of lost teenage girls and their mothers' fights to save not only their relationships, but often their daughters' lives. The book succeeds because the mothers describe distressing times candidly and openly, not in hushed tones often used when relaying deep family issues.

In response to Mary Pipher's bestselling *Reviving Ophelia*, these mothers share their thoughts and feelings on a multitude of topics including eating disorders, fitting in, depression, institutions, rebellion and boundaries, the absence or presence of fathers, and the "crazy soup emotions" of love, anger, and frustration. *Surviving Ophelia* is evidence that each teenager's situation is unparalleled, and Dellasega does not offer any finite solutions to the tumultuous teen years. Instead, the author and mothers provide parenting ideas, from the practical to the radical, and measure their own success and failure. In one letter titled, "Tears from a Rose," mother Rose states, "What I do for a living, what my real name is, and where I live seem irrelevant. What defines me is the hell I've lived through, and what I've learned along the way... I'd like to help other parents avoid some of the traps I fell into and find some of the helpful things I discovered."

The end of this book provides an appendix where mothers can find help for themselves and for their troubled daughters. It also includes letters from some of the mothers' daughters. These Ophelias describe challenges from their own points of view and share how they're feeling currently. --Rhonda Langdon

From Publishers Weekly

If there were any doubt that Mary Pipher's 1994 bestseller *Reviving Ophelia* spawned a virtual cottage industry about teenage girls at risk, the latest Ophelia-related title by psychologist Dellasega (a clinician at Penn State's College of Medicine) lays it to rest. The book follows close on the heels of *Ophelia's Mom* (Forecasts, June 25), Nina Shandler's response to her daughter Sara's 2001 bestseller, *Ophelia Speaks*. Both Dellasega and Shandler have chosen to use Sara Shandler's approach and collect various essays, but while Nina Shandler structured each chapter of her book around specific problems, such as drugs or school, Dellasega chooses a more sprawling, conversational approach. Her chapters discuss the types of responses that out-of-control daughters elicit in their mothers, from special mother-daughter moments to explosive anger and regret. Despite the uneven quality of the selections (they range from thoughtful to clichéd), they share a raw immediacy that may help other moms. In fact, Dellasega credits some of the pieces with giving her the courage to send her daughter, Ellen, to a "wilderness program" to overcome anorexia. Like the mother who penned the excerpt "Tears from a Rose," the contributors are women who have tried to do their best, even when that wasn't always enough. "What happens when you do everything as right as you can, and it all goes wrong?" she questions. Interwoven throughout are Dellasega's ongoing concerns about Ellen, now 17. While it's obvious that the author wrote the book to overcome her struggles with her own teenager, there are lessons here that will help every mother dealing with an adolescent daughter.

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Review

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