

My Mother's Daughter

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QUESTIONS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Rona Maynard has said that she became her own woman "in spite of and because of" her mother, Fredelle Maynard. What does this statement mean to you? Does it shed any light on your own relationship with your mother, or your daughter?
2. Rona says in the prologue, "The story of my life has been, in large part, a story about learning to tell the truth as I see it." She also says she could never have shared her dream with her mother if Fredelle had been well. Why was speaking up such a challenge for Rona? Do women find it harder than men to tell their truth?
3. Rona writes unsparingly about her father's alcoholism, her mother's anger and her own suicidal thoughts during a bout of depression. In your opinion, is this Too Much Information or a courageous act of honesty? Is it possible to honour one's parents and still tell hard truths about them?
4. Rona grew up feeling less loveable than her perkier sister, "the Adorable One." How did this sense of difference shape her later life? Was Rona's position in the family more fortunate than she knew?
5. On both sides of her family, Rona's grandparents were immigrants. Her Canadian parents had to fill out "alien registration" cards in the U.S. How does the theme of exile help to drive the story?
6. In a pivotal scene, Rona is molested in a crowded subway car while heading home from her Radcliffe interview. She tells her mother that she blew the interview, but not that she was groped by a stranger. Why do you think she kept the secret?
7. After Rona is dragged up the stairs by her drunken father, she vows to avenge herself. She eventually succeeds by driving her father out of the house. How does revenge affect her life?
8. As a young woman Rona rejected writing as a career path. She says, "I wanted to grind [writing] under my shoe, to tear it into pieces and burn it, to stuff writing into a sack full of stones and cast it into the ocean." Why did she feel so strongly? Now she has written *My Mother's Daughter*. What did she have to learn about herself in order to reach this point?

9. Rona is frank about being a distracted, overburdened mother while raising her son and holding a demanding job. Fredelle was sharply critical of Rona as a mother. How would you describe Fredelle's own mothering? Why did mothering provoke the most painful moments between the two? What does this suggest about the standard that mothers are expected to meet?
10. Rona was able to achieve what her mother had been denied—a high-profile job that became the focus for her greatest gifts. Along the way, she had to fight to be taken seriously and to be paid what she was worth. Was the journey worth the struggle? Do you think it is possible for women to "have it all?"
11. Fredelle sent a flowery tribute to her mother every year for Mother's Day. Rona made a point of ignoring Mother's Day—until she sensed that she would soon lose her mother, and hand-delivered a letter full of gratitude and love. Do the rituals surrounding motherhood help or hinder the full expression of love between mothers and daughters? Is it time to create some new rituals?
12. Toward the end of her memoir, Rona reaches a hard-won understanding of her father's struggle with alcoholism and finds it in her heart to forgive him. Could she have called this book *My Father's Daughter*? Do she and her father have more in common than she knew as a child?
13. Rona describes the death of a woman's mother as a life-changing transition. Her memoir includes two deathbed scenes between a mother and a daughter. Rona's farewell to her mother is very different from Fredelle's to her own mother. What do these moments reveal about the characters?
14. At the end of *My Mother's Daughter*, Rona gets rid of her grandmother's mink coat. What does the coat represent in the life of her family? What do you think of the ending? What does it suggest about Rona's future life?

Let's talk