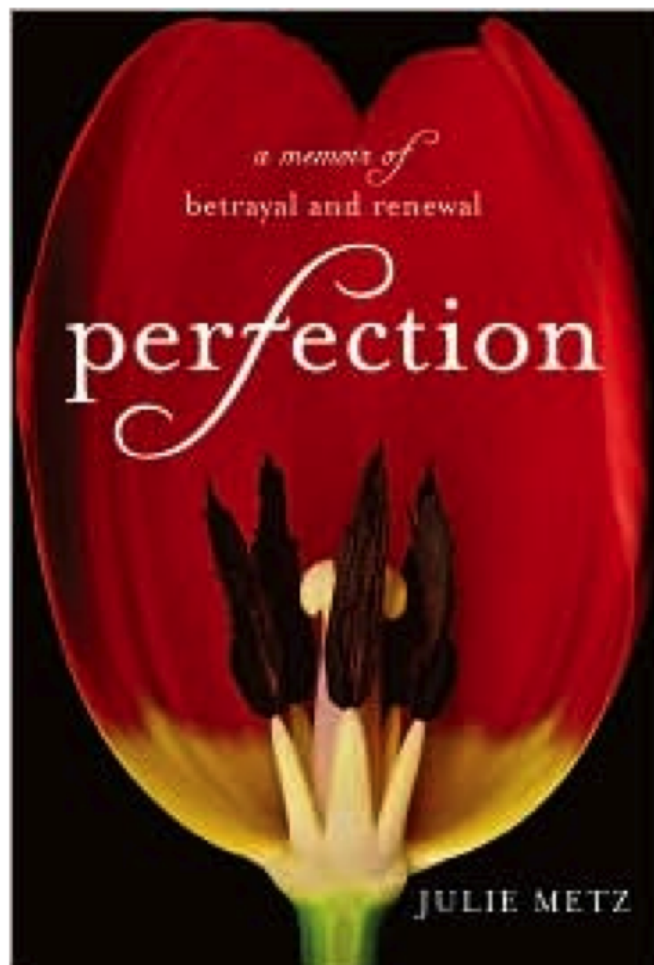


Julie Metz Talks Her Latest Work, 'Perfection'



By Stacey Small

Every one of us has felt the pain of betrayal at some point,

but Julie Metz's came in the wake of her husband's sudden and untimely death. Just as she was beginning to heal and return to a normal life months after she was widowed, Metz learns her marriage wasn't what she thought it was. Through letters and correspondence, Metz's memoir recreates her most difficult moments as she struggles to bring her life back to perfection.

How do you deal with the shortcomings of your spouse?

Cupid's Advice:

At the beginning of a relationship, it's easy to think that life is perfect. You're blown away by all of the positive qualities your new partner possesses, and you simply can't imagine that anything could go wrong. The thought that your mate has qualities you might not find attractive never crosses your mind. Sure, you may be a great match. No one is disputing that fact. But perfection in a relationship simply doesn't exist. You have to learn to deal with the things you view as your spouse's shortcomings – his less positive qualities. The best way to do that is to remind yourself of the strong points in your relationship, so that the negatives seem minuscule in comparison.

You've mentioned in an interview that you have a wonderful therapist who has helped you greatly in the past. Do you find that people who've read your work now reach out to you for guidance in their own personal lives?

What a good therapist does is help you do the work of rethinking your life by guiding you through your own process.

I do receive e-mails from readers who ask me for advice. While I do not in any way consider myself a professional advisor, I have learned some useful lessons in rebuilding my own life in the aftermath of betrayal that may be useful for others. Envisioning your future life, making a plan, doing something every day to get you closer to that vision, persevering in the face of what might feel like failure—I

offer this advice to readers because it feels universal...and I try to follow it myself!

You say that *Perfection* began as a series of letters. At what point did you realize this gripping story needed to become a full book?

In the first weeks and months after my husband's sudden death, friends who lived far away called and wrote to me to see how I was doing. It was too difficult to call everyone, so I wrote a daily e-mail and sent it to whoever had contacted me that day. The correspondence was deeply comforting and helped me feel connected to the world at a time when I felt myself retreating. When I found out about my husband's affairs, I took another giant step backwards and began again. The correspondence with friends became even more comforting.

Two writers suggested that I think about writing a book about my experiences. At first I dismissed the idea. I wasn't a professional writer and I wasn't sure how to begin. One of the writers was insistent that I try, and she sent me home with directions: go home, sit for twenty minutes a day, write.

As the writing process became more a part of my life, I found myself engaged. I was certain that there were other women and men who had been through something like my experience, and I hoped that my story might bring them comfort.

Of the women who were involved with your husband that you confronted, did any of them react in unexpected or surprising ways? What did it take for you to truly accept their apologies?

The whole experience of contacting my husband's lovers was surprising for me. Most of the women didn't seem too surprised to hear from me. In fact, in a few cases they seemed to be expecting my call. The fact that they spoke to me in an open way about their relationships with my husband helped me find forgiveness more quickly than I might have

imagined.

It was harder to find forgiveness for Cathy, the woman in my town. She had not only engaged in a long-term affair over several years, but had used our daughters' friendship to gain access to my home. She was not open with me once the affair came to light and seemed to be in complete denial about the emotional consequences of the affair, eager to cover it all up so that life could continue as it had before. It took a long time for me to make sense of this so that I could move on.

Other women I have talked to who have discovered long-term affairs have told me that it took a few years before they could wake up in the morning without thinking about the betrayal first thing. That was my experience as well. It takes time to rebuild trust in yourself and in others.

In the FAQ section of your book's website, you state, "I hope that my daughter and other young women can learn something from my painful experience." Now that she is a teen, has your daughter read any of this book, and if so, how has it helped you and/or her grow?

When I received the offer to publish *Perfection*, I spoke to my daughter about the project. She was 11 at that time, and while many people might think that is too young to discuss such adult subjects, we have always been close, and the loss of her father strengthened our bond. While I worked on the book, I left my laptop out in the open, and when I received printed copies I left those out for her to read. My goal was to depict her father with compassion, as man who was flawed, but who loved both of us. She has always been supportive and described my book as "a real woman's story."

My daughter is now a wise 14-year old. I do think of my story as a cautionary tale, and I hope that she and other young women will think carefully about the choices they make and learn to see through the slick surfaces our culture often rewards. It's harder than ever to make good personal choices

in our celebrity-driven media culture. For this younger generation, becoming media savvy—learning how to see through the artificial surface of advertising, “reality” shows, fashion magazines, websites, and social networking sites—is more difficult, and more important than ever. I am on Facebook and Twitter, I text plenty, and I love my iPhone...but I try to live with the awareness that online connections do not replace real relationships.

What advice would you give to those who are hiding or have hidden their infidelity from their partners?

We can see in our own lives as well as those of celebrities that even when you think you have successfully hidden your secrets, they will come out of hiding anyway. The secrets, even while they are still hidden, will cause damage to yourself and people you care about: your partner/spouse, your children, and your friends. When you are keeping big secrets, you begin to compartmentalize your life in a way that is sure to mess up your own thinking.

And eventually, because it is hard to keep secrets forever, you will be found out. Your story may not be international Tiger Woods/Sandra Bullock news, but it can still upend your life. However painful it may be, I would encourage people who are keeping secrets to come clean. If you are unhappy in your relationship, there are better and more honorable ways to resolve your issues.