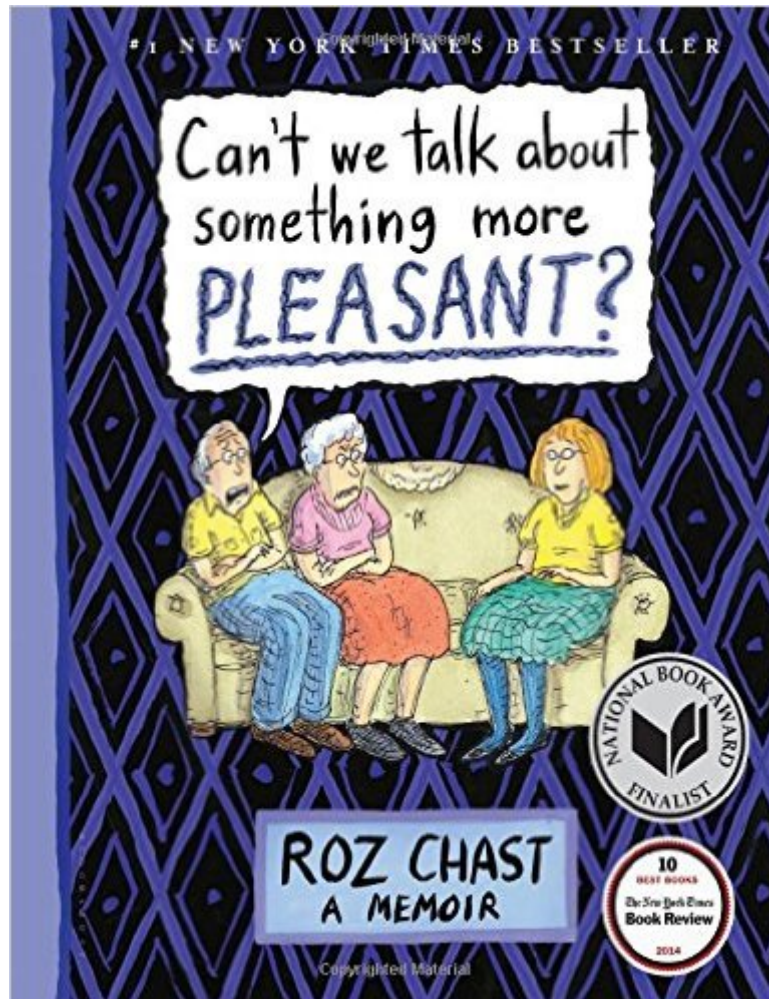


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Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?: A Memoir



Synopsis

#1 New York Times Bestseller
2014 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST
In her first memoir, Roz Chast brings her signature wit to the topic of aging parents. Spanning the last several years of their lives and told through four-color cartoons, family photos, and documents, and a narrative as rife with laughs as it is with tears, Chast's memoir is both comfort and comic relief for anyone experiencing the life-altering loss of elderly parents. When it came to her elderly mother and father, Roz held to the practices of denial, avoidance, and distraction. But when Elizabeth Chast climbed a ladder to locate an old souvenir from the "crazy closet" - with predictable results - the tools that had served Roz well through her parents' seventies, eighties, and into their early nineties could no longer be deployed. While the particulars are Chast-ian in their idiosyncrasies - an anxious father who had relied heavily on his wife for stability as he slipped into dementia and a former assistant principal mother whose overbearing personality had sidelined Roz for decades - the themes are universal: adult children accepting a parental role; aging and unstable parents leaving a family home for an institution; dealing with uncomfortable physical intimacies; managing logistics; and hiring strangers to provide the most personal care. An amazing portrait of two lives at their end and an only child coping as best she can, *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant* will show the full range of Roz Chast's talent as cartoonist and storyteller.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

* As I write this, my 83-year-old dad is withering away in an assisted living facility, riddled with Alzheimer's. Sometimes I want my Dad to die now - because he's unaware of his suffering - and

he'd cuss me out if he knew he is turning into what Roz Chast's mother describes as "a pulsating piece of protoplasm." I feel guilty feeling this way - but "Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?" makes such forbidden thoughts feel normal.* (BTW, don't buy the Kindle version. This title, with its colorful cartoons and photos - as well as its handsome construction as a hardcover book - truly belongs on your coffee table. I sampled the Kindle version, didn't like it, and bought the hardcover.)* This book feels weirdly clairvoyant. It exposed my doubts, fears and paradoxical feelings about watching my parents die slowly before my eyes. I've read almost everything about the subject of aging and dying. And yet this is the first book that captures the exhausting experience of caring for aging parents, e.g., that it's sometimes gross - (see passages about hoarding, incontinence and "grime") - AND funny - (see "The Wheel of Doom" and Roz Chast's father's obsession with myriad bank books, decades old).* The author's hand-wringing about whether there's going to be enough money to pay for her parents' care is spot on. How long will the money last if they live "X" more years vs. "Y" more years? I do these calculations every month, constantly updating and trying to prepare for the worst. Any savings will be drained by expenses which will have no effect on terminal outcomes. If the daily care and feeding of your parents doesn't kill you - then the avalanche of paperwork and legal stuff that must be done - will.

Cartoonist Roz Chast has written/drawn a book about her parents' final years, "Can't We Talk About Something Pleasant?". In it she describes both her own upbringing - only child, born late-in-life to older and neurotic parents - and how her feelings as a child hindered her dealing with the parents as they aged. She is certainly not alone in her mixed-up emotions towards her parents; most of us have the same feelings. Roz Chast can just express them better. This is a difficult book to read. It must have been excruciating to live through and then put down on paper. But it is a book that all us "boomers" (hate the word but what else is there? "Lunch meat in the sandwich generation"?) should read. Because I'm not sure too much is going to change when we reach our 80's and 90's. We tend to have fewer children - Roz was an only child, as I noted above - and so fewer people to share the burdens of us as we age. Will we be put in Assisted Living "places" with the alacrity we seem to be putting our own parents into? For the record, both my parents died in nursing homes where they received excellent care. Roz Chast's parents - George and Elizabeth - lived well into their 90's. And they aged "together". They tried to take care of themselves and each other in their dingy Brooklyn apartment, but it came the time to get them the extra care they could no longer give themselves. Roz describes how going through her parents' vacated apartment was like going through a junk store haven. And she shows photographs - as well as using her drawings - to show how crowded

the apartment truly was. The reader may come away thinking Roz had conflicted feelings about her parents. She sure did and she was certainly entitled to those feelings.

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