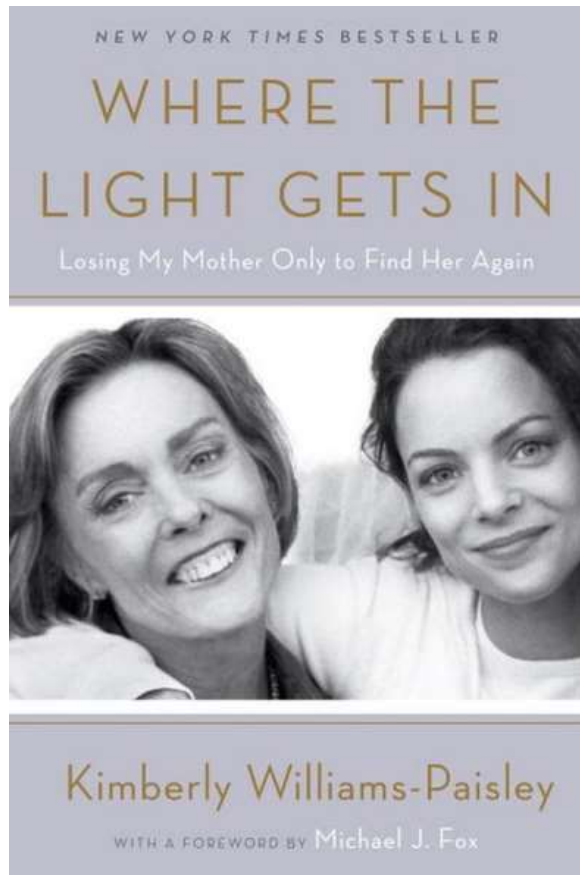


## A Thoughtful Chronicle: Williams-Paisley's 'Where the Light Gets In' focuses on family

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*"Where the Light Gets In: Losing My Mother Only to Find Her Again"* by Kimberly Williams-Paisley. New York: Crown Archetype, 2016, 272 pages, \$27.00.



"Few people outside the five of us knew that Mom was in trouble," Kimberly Williams-Paisley writes in the sixth chapter of "Where the Light Gets In: Losing My Mother Only to Find Her Again," her new memoir chronicling the evolution of the various relationships in her life after her mother was diagnosed with primary progressive aphasia at age 62. "At home, Dad helped hide her symptoms. He often edited her reports and letters for her job at the Fox Foundation.

"When she needed help in social settings, she signaled him with a worried glance or a touch on his arm," she continues. "All of us had learned to patch up awkward silences with small talk during conversations. We knew it was unrealistic to believe that no one outside the inner circle noticed how Mom hesitated when she talked or made mistakes when she wrote. We hoped that the charade might end with this visit."

The all-too-familiar story Williams-Paisley tells is multi-faceted and touches the heart on many levels. While the relationship between the author and her mother forms the architecture on which everything

else revolves, there is much more going on here than a mother-daughter tale of adversity and redemption. Her mother's ailment has a profound effect on all the significant relationships in Williams-Paisley's life, including those with her father, Gurney, her husband, Brad, and other family members and associates in the artistic community. How those relationships are tested and ultimately strengthened over time is what I found most inspiring and moving about this delightfully uplifting volume.

"Where the Light Gets In" consists of an introduction and 17 chapters. An especially helpful feature is Williams-Paisley's inclusion of a 10-page "Resources" section at the conclusion of the main text. Here, she provides a fairly extensive set of frequently asked questions for those who may be going through a similar experience with someone they care about. There were several issues addressed in this section I had not thought of but would arise at some point as dementia runs its inevitable course; questions like "How Can You Keep a Dangerous Driver off the Roads?" and "What Can Caregivers Do When a Loved One Becomes Incontinent or Aggressive?"

My Dad passed away last year after a 20-year battle with prostate cancer. Although his symptoms were primarily physical for most of that time, in the last two years of his life he suffered from many of the same impairments Williams-Paisley explains in such vivid detail. He was unable to remember if he had taken his medication, and he was prone to losing personal items he had previously been able to keep up with effortlessly, like his reading glasses and dentures.

And I could immediately relate – as I am sure many of us can – to her description of the search for a suitable long-term care facility in chapter thirteen. This could have been one of the assisted-living residences my brother and I visited: “The first place we visited reminded me of my grandmother’s nursing home from almost thirty years before. It smelled like overcooked lima beans and diapers. There were no windows in the main sitting area, where residents dozed in front of a ‘Jeopardy!’ rerun on a flat-screen TV. Two women, with paper bibs tucked into their shirts, sat at a small square dining table. They stared ahead, one with a half-empty cup of coffee in front of her and the other with a bowl of untouched applesauce. Neither spoke. All of the residents looked older than my mother by about 10 years. We left feeling depressed.”

Williams-Paisley includes numerous black-and-white photographs scattered liberally throughout the manuscript to help the reader get a better sense of the down-to-earth people who populate this exquisite primer. Indeed, anyone who has ever struggled to take care of a loved one – especially a family member – grappling with an illness or other chronic condition will be able to emotionally connect with her poignant narrative in an empathetic and visceral manner. Many of the pictures could have been taken from any of our albums; they help bring to life this heartbreaking but infinitely optimistic profile in courage to get a better sense of who Linda is and why Williams-Paisley has such an inseparable bond with her that seems to grow more resilient as the disease continues to progress.

An actress, writer and advocate for dementia research and caregivers, Williams-Paisley is involved in a number of charity and relief organizations. During her 25-year career, she has been featured in several motion pictures, including “Father of the Bride,” “Father of the Bride Part II,” “How to Eat Fried Worms” and “We Are Marshall.” She has also appeared in numerous television shows, including “According to Jim,” “Boston Legal,” “Royal Pains,” “Nashville” and “Two and a Half Men.” A graduate of Northwestern University, where she majored in drama, Williams-Paisley is married to Brad Paisley, the country music singer; they have two sons. This is her first book.

Ellen Folan, a publicist for Crown Archetype, astutely noted that Williams-Paisley “writes candidly about so many of the difficult realities of this insidious disease and proves with a sense of hope and open-hearted faith that light can be found even in the darkest places. It is a heartwarming and heartrending tribute to the often fragile yet unbreakable bonds we have with our mothers.”

After reading this thoughtful and thought-provoking chronicle of a remarkable journey that is still ongoing, I could not have said it better myself. If you have ever had to deal with the seemingly overwhelming responsibility that goes with having to care for an aging parent whose identity is slowly slipping away, you will be able to instantly relate to “Where the Light Gets In.” In the final analysis, this is a book about the preeminent importance of family and what really matters at the end of the day. I recommend it highly.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*

*Editor’s note: Actress and author Kimberly Williams-Paisley will discuss and sign her book “Where the Light Gets In: Losing My Mother Only to Find Her Again” at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Knicely Conference Center.*