

## Humble Beginnings

Author Sarah Moffett offers a touching memoir about 'Growing Up.'

By Greg Wyshynski

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The first half of Sarah Moffett's memoir "Growing Up Moffett" reads as though she's taken a stack of ancestral photo albums and translated them into a book of recognizable anecdotes and universal themes — covering everything from the precocious questions between a child and a parent to the memorable adventures of a family vacation.

But just like everything changed for the author at age 12, Page 101 of her memoir signals a severe tonal shift that hits the reader like an unanticipated jab to the gut.

"In a memoir, it's difficult to say that it's designed a certain way. It's life, so it takes its own course," said Moffett, 27.

The innocence of childhood and the lighthearted tales from family gatherings are shoved to the background in the span of two sentences:

"Cancer is a word you hear every day. But the word doesn't mean much until it's you or someone you love."

Three members of Moffett's tightly knit family were diagnosed with terminal cancer in the span of a year, sending relatives on cross-country trips to care for them and, eventually, say goodbye. Her family's faith and her own emotional maturation are at the heart of Moffett's book, which was released this year by FaithWalk publishing.

"Childhood is a wonderful thing, and that it's something to be cherished. It's such a cliché, but it's the hard things in life that define us," she said. "For me personally, it would have been a disservice to those individuals that passed away to use their deaths as an 'out' for dealing with my life."

MOFFETT LIVES in Alexandria and practices law in the Alexandria offices of LeClair Ryan. A few years ago, during Christmas, she realized the stories her family traded presented themselves as a kind of preserved record of years gone by. Formerly a history major, Moffett's old instincts kicked in and she began to compile these stories in a collection.

"What started out as an effort to preserve the memories of the family became a multi-faceted purpose — to remember, to preserve and to [let] my littlest sister know what happened," said Moffett, one of four children.

FaithWalk, based out of Michigan, bills itself as a publisher that releases books that are "Christian in orientation while covering a wide range of topics of interest for believers and spiritual seekers alike." It categorizes Moffett's book as an Inspirational Memoir.

Moffett, who regularly attends First Baptist of Alexandria and McLean Bible Church, acknowledges that faith plays a large role in her narrative but doesn't overwhelm her story.

"Coming from a very strong faith-based background, we're extraordinarily mainstream," she said. "For some people, faith is just who they are. It's like the air they breathe. It's not something they hit you over the head with. So far, with the readers, it's been more of a

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Sarah Moffett is the author of "Growing Up Moffett," an inspirational new memoir about her childhood. The Alexandria resident shared her thoughts in our standardized quiz about local life:

What is the last, best meal you had in an Alexandria restaurant? Rustico. No question. They stole the chef from Zola. I think it was their Italian sausage pizza. They've also got this great tasting menu, and they're one of the only places I know of that does beer pairings.

What do you like best about living in Alexandria?

I could talk about this for hours. Alexandria, for me, is the perfect marriage between the old world and the new. You're a part of something bigger than yourself when you live there. And you're only a jog or a bike ride away from D.C.

What is the most frustrating thing about living in Alexandria?

secular audience."

IN SUPPORT OF "Growing Up Moffett," the author is embarking on a book tour that includes appearances at St. Elmo's Coffee Pub (2300 Mount Vernon Ave., 703-739-9268) on Saturday, April 14 from 2-4 p.m.; Saturday, April 21, at the Barnes and Noble Potomac Yard (3651 Jefferson Davis Highway, 703-299-9124) from 3-5 p.m.; and Wednesday, May 2, at The Buzz (901 Slaters Lane, 703-600-2899 in Alexandria from 7-9 p.m.

While the book gets into emotionally tragic territory, Moffett's wit and self-deprecation shine through as an author. "In the evolution of my personality, I'd be lying if I said I haven't gone from sarcastic to cynical to jaded," she said.

That tone, however, may need to be curbed as Moffett preps her follow-up memoir, which deals with even more difficult times for her and her family. "I decided once I hit 15 [years old] that it was enough for one book. I felt like there was a possibility for a second book," she said. "The backhanded, sarcastic tone of this book doesn't really fit the late teens, early 20s angst of the second book."

Once again Moffett will work with her parents, Dennis and Rachel, to mine stories from their family's past — the forgotten ones and the one painfully remembered.

"The best compliment I ever received for the book was after it was completed. My dad looked at me and said, 'For so long, I couldn't remember. I couldn't let myself remember. And now that you have, it's OK for me to do the same,'" she said.

"I was extraordinarily touched."

Buying a house. I don't want to move out of the area, but I'm going to have to buy smaller if I want to live in Old Town. That might just be the callous, 20-something response.

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