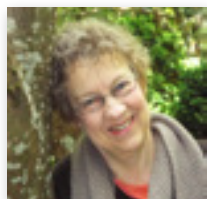


My Father's Closet

KAREN A. McCLINTOCK

“From the outside, the McClintocks looked about as wholesome and midwestern as it gets. But on the inside, a bewildering emotional vacuum was taking a complicated toll. Karen McClintock reconstructs the details of her father’s double life with novelistic flair, keen psychological insight, and graceful compassion.”

—Alison Bechdel, author of *Fun Home* (2006), *Are You My Mother?* (2012), and 2014 MacArthur Fellow



Karen A. McClintock, PhD, is a psychologist specializing in family secrets and shame recovery. She is a national workshop leader and teaches human sexuality at Southern Oregon University. She is the author of four previous books, including *Sexual Shame: An Urgent Call to Healing* and *Shame-Less Lives, Grace-Full Congregations*.

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Thirty years after her father’s death, Karen McClintock sets out to find the gay father she never really knew. As we follow the unraveling family secret, we find ourselves drawn into her story as they stumble into infidelity, grieve heartbreaking losses, and remain loyal in love.

Set in Columbus, Ohio, *My Father’s Closet* tells the story of how just before the war, McClintock’s parents fell in love and married, while overseas in Germany the man whom she believes became her father’s lover was concealing his Jewish and gay identities in order to escape to America. A set of her father’s journals, letters her parents sent to each other during the Second World War, and a mysterious painting all lead her toward the truth about her gay father. McClintock weaves a complex secret into the fabric of lives we truly care about. And in the process, she leads us out of her father’s closet.

This gripping memoir captures the longing children feel for a distant or hidden parent and taps into the complexity of human connection and abandonment. The characters are resilient and vibrant. The hidden lovers, the nosy neighbors, and surprise lovers all show up. In the end, this extraordinary family finds ways to connect and freedom to love. Anyone who grew up with a family secret will appreciate the dynamics afoot in this fast-paced and compelling story.

Advance praise for *My Father's Closet*

“In *My Father's Closet*, Karen McClintock reports from the heart of America, the heart of the twentieth century, and the heart of a daughter who struggled to understand and draw close to a kind and loving father who kept her at a poignant distance in order to protect necessary illusions. This fascinating and eloquent memoir reveals the price our society extracted from its gay people (and their families) who refused to marginalize themselves simply because the absolute truth of their hearts did not fit the accepted mold.” —**Candace Walsh, author of *Licking the Spoon: A Memoir of Food, Family, and Identity***

“*My Father's Closet* is a gift of love, filling the reader with a gorgeous blend of sadness and hope. Fear of being different has driven too many American families to pain and tragedy. I felt honored and moved to have gotten to know this family through beautifully crafted prose.” —**Bill Rauch, Artistic Director, Oregon Shakespeare Festival**

An excerpt from *My Father's Closet*

When our lighting contractor called me out to the garage after a brief inspection he said, “I’m sorry lady, but your garage ceiling is sagging so badly I can’t install the new fixtures.” “You better move that stuff out of the attic before it falls in on you,” he harrumphed and walked off the job. The next Saturday I ascended the rickety stairs to haul down dusty boxes I’d stored away after my parents died. I pulled back the flaps of a box addressed to the Columbus Ohio house I’d grown up in, and reached in to find a small hat box full of faded letters my parents sent to each other in the first years of their forty-three year relationship. With my next reach into the box I discovered a black spiral-bound journal dated 1939, penned by my father when he was just nineteen. That night as I sat reading in my usual overstuffed chair in my Ashland Oregon home, I could hear the resonant baritone voice of my father. I was happily following along as he described his innocent courtship of my mother at meetings of the North High School thespian society, and over a two-straw shake at the malt shop. They went dancing to the tunes of Guy Lombardo which he described as a “terrible band,” and then less than a week later he described a sexual scene with a man named Jim that stopped me cold. I wanted to warn my mother, so she could avoid the heartache of her celibate marriage, but of course, I had no such power. At that moment I could have tossed the whole thing in the trash, but I stubbornly read on in order to meet the real father I had never been allowed to know. The letters and the journal compelled me to pull out the last hinge pin on the door of our family closet.



Alice Livingston



Charles Marvin McClintock



Wedding Day



Karen and Marsha in the backyard



Dr. Karen A. McClintock is a psychologist, author and congregational consultant. She belongs to a weekly writing group, is a member of Willamette Writers and has four published books. Raised in a closeted family in Columbus Ohio, she moved west to attend seminary at Pacific School of Religion and thereafter worked as a parish pastor and chaplain. She assisted healthcare providers with multiple-loss grief during the AIDS epidemic in the San Francisco Bay area.

Her most recently published book, *Shame-Less Lives, Grace-full Congregations* (Alban) sheds light on patterns of shame which limit interpersonal connection within family and organizational systems. *Healthy Disclosure in Congregations* (Alban) explores professional ethics, communication boundaries, secrets in congregations, and sexual abuse prevention. She has also authored; *Preventing Sexual Abuse in Congregations* (Alban) and *Sexual Shame: An Urgent Call to Healing* (Fortress Press).

For the past fifteen years she has been an adjunct professor at Southern Oregon University, teaching human sexuality and a dozen additional courses in the psychology department. She has a thriving general practice as a psychologist and has taught workshops in over 40 states in the U.S. on ways to eradicate sexual shame. She engages in conversations about sexuality that are life affirming, while creating safety and healing. She is passionate about liberating LGBTQ individuals and family members from secrets and shame. She won the Southern Oregon Lambda Community award for her outspoken advocacy for LGBTQ individuals and their families.

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Q: How does *My Father's Closet* speak to the experience of LGBT individuals in history?

A: The book touches on a number of topics and event, including:

Nazi Germany exterminations of gay men

The persecution of gay soldiers in WWII

New York City as a safe haven

The underground nightclubs and safety issues for gay men in New York

The first Christopher Street Gay Liberation March after Stonewall

Polari, a gay language used by my father and friends

Reverend Paul Abels becomes my mentor, and comes out as the first UMC gay clergy to do so

The AIDS epidemic comes to the Bay Area, and I work with healthcare providers to cope with multiple loss grief

My father is oppressed by his brother's right wing religious beliefs

The first gay porn films end up in our basement

I conduct a marriage ceremony for a lesbian couple in Medford Oregon in the early 90's and lose my job

The book in its entirety illustrates the heartache of hiding, secrets, and the coming out experience of individuals and family members.

Q: How does this memoir connect with your current work as a psychologist?

A: I am a national expert on sexual secrets in families, and on healing the damage of sexual shame. I've written four prior books on sexuality, sexual conduct, and sexual secrets in families and organizations. I've conducted workshops on this topic every year for the past fifteen years – at churches, for clergy, and as continuing education for psychologists and seminarians. No self-help books exist to help people raised in family closets. I hope that my book, which highlights the ordinary life of a Midwest family in which this family secret existed along with love and respect, will reach families in similar situations.



The Trillium imprint publishes books about Ohio and the Midwest in an effort to help the citizens of the state learn more about the unique history, the diverse culture, and the natural environment of the state of Ohio. The imprint takes its name from the state's official wildflower.

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