



Any Bitter Thing
A novel by Monica Wood, 2005
Book Review

by Pat Bertschy

Any Bitter Thing is the story of a young girl, Lizzy, raised by her uncle, Father Mike Murphy, a Catholic priest.

Some stories are good, but some are so good that you want to live that life. Such was Lizzy's childhood with Father Mike.

When Lizzy's parents died in an accident, she was only two and a half, too young to remember them other than as a picture of parents "smiling out at me from a silver frame at my bedside." Uncle Mike, her mother's brother, took her to live with him.

"I want her," Lizzy imagined him declaring to his surviving sister Aunt Celie. They were discussing her placement after her parents' accident. "He makes arrangements," Father Mike said of God, meaning Lizzy, his treasure. God had taken his sister and her husband, and had given him Lizzy in return.

Theirs was a kind, beautiful, loving relationship. Uncle Mike read to her, books of her choice, "curled up in the only comfortable chair." They cooked, they tended a moon garden, and he held her when night terrors woke her up.

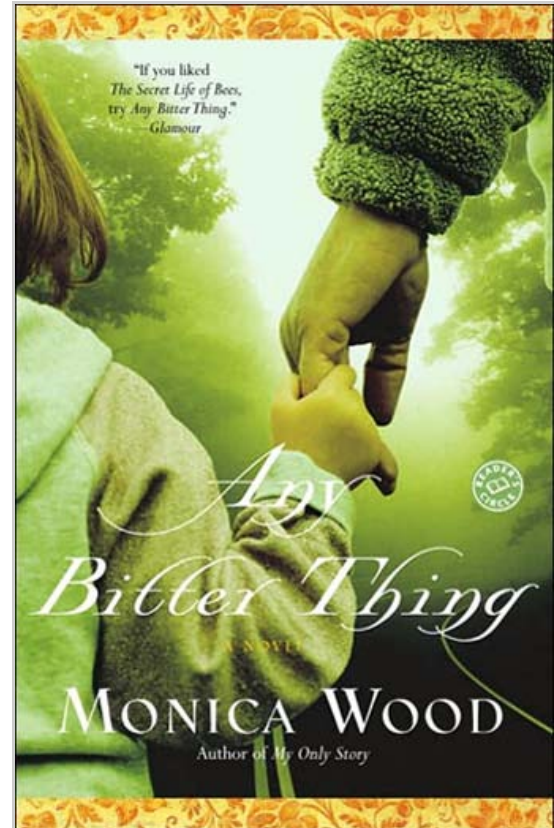
He watched her grow; he let her have best-friend sleepovers although he worried about her all night when she was away. Lizzy felt that her life was like a beautiful flower garden she had been delivered into. Father Mike felt no less blessed. He considered his life "a pleasure for which he thanks God seven times daily."

The story is not all good; when Lizzy is nine, she is abruptly taken away from her Uncle and sent to live with Aunt Celie who was "no more than a stranger."

As an adult, Lizzy struggles in a marriage where too much goes unsaid. The silence becomes a gulf of distance, then misunderstanding. Lizzy is in an accident, and while recovering in the hospital, has a vision of her long-dead Uncle Mike. She is driven to find out why he left her and their life together and she begins to examine her marriage.

We revisit Lizzy's childhood and her blessed life with Uncle Mike. She learns more about her uncle and the people who touched their lives: the attractive neighbor, her abusive husband, the busy-body housekeeper, the distant Aunt, Lizzy's best friend Mariette, and the unsolved mystery of their separation.

The book is short at 331 pages for the intricate story it tells. Monica Wood's writing is tight but lyrical; she builds scenes filled with emotion. Any Bitter Thing is a story of love, human understanding and, most of all, forgiveness.



Available at:

www.amazon.com

www.monicawood.com

www.barnesandnoble.com

To read an excerpt from *Any Bitter Thing*
go to: www.monicawood.com/exabt.html

Pat Bertschy is an avid reader who lives on Cape Cod.

She was recently awarded a scholarship to attend this summer's Cape Cod Writers Center Conference, held at the Craigville Conference Center, for her nonfiction story "Discovery."

Pat was also named one of five finalists in the Norman Mailer Cape and Islands Community College Writing Awards for a work of non-fiction titled "The Long Walk".