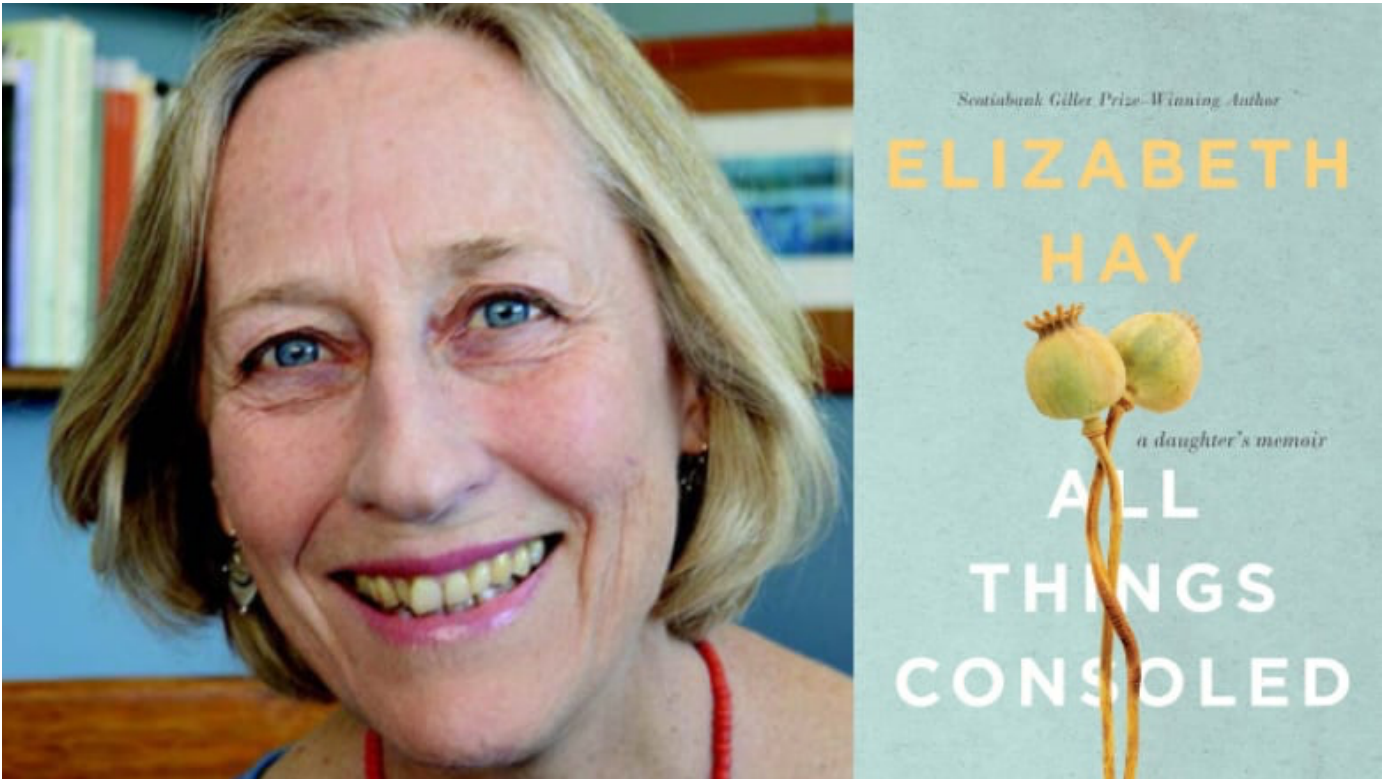


Why Elizabeth Hay chronicled the decline of her dynamic parents in new memoir



All Things Consoled is a memoir by Elizabeth Hay. (Mark Fried, McClelland & Stewart)

In [All Things Consoled](#), [Elizabeth Hay](#) shares her life as the eldest daughter, and later primary caregiver, of two formidable parents. Jean Hay, a painter, was frugal to the extreme, cooking up meals out of anything — to her child's great ire — remotely edible. Gordon Hay, on the other hand, harboured an explosive temper that was sometimes violent.

As [Hay](#) takes care of her elderly parents, resentments — old

and new — rise to the surface and slowly give way to peace. Below, [Hay](#) describes what it was like to document this period of her life.

[All Things Consoled](#) won [the 2018 Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction](#) and is on the [shortlist for the 2019 RBC Taylor Prize](#).

Revising old memories

"There are things that I wrote in my 20s, 30s and 40s about my parents that I couldn't publish while they were alive. It was interesting to revisit these things and see how narrow and stuck in my own point of view I was. I'm glad that the book is a product of my 60s and not of my 30s, because it has a much larger view of them, and of life.

"I have a few worries about the reaction of members of my family, but on the whole I feel more confident and solid about this book than I ever felt about any of my novels. I'm very glad I wrote it. I'm very glad that I brought my parents to the fore and into the light. They were interesting people. If you read the whole book, you appreciate how interesting they were."

Editing your opinion of your parents

"I had a lot of grievances about the way I was raised as a

child. Even though I became very close to my mother after I left home, those grievances were in the background. When I came to reconnect with the story about the time I made my mother cry, I was able to see — it was a bit hard because I'm still pretty narrow-minded — just how I could have behaved otherwise and that tearful quarrel we had wouldn't have happened. I was able to see just how stridently opinionated I was and how unable I was to laugh something off and let it go.

"Similarly, with my father's temper, I am able to be more forgiving now. He was an explosive man with a lot of pent-up emotion. I can see that for all the times he lost his temper, there were many more times when he controlled it too. For many years, I just saw the explosiveness and didn't appreciate his efforts at self-control.

"It's very good to live long enough that you can revise your view of your parents."

When heart congestion is a good sign

"There was a challenge in dealing with some of the material that gave me a feeling of congestion in my heart. Yet, I knew that if I had that feeling in my heart, then the material was real. Often when I write fiction, the big challenge is believing in what I'm writing because it doesn't seem real and it doesn't seem urgent. I wonder, 'What's the point of this?'

But with this memoir I didn't ever wonder, 'What's the point?' Once you've written a scene that actually seems to work and that flows out of that foggy heart, that's really rewarding."

Elizabeth Hay's comments have been edited for length and clarity.