

## Pass It On®...

### The Weight We Carry and the Burdens We Share.

*The life of best-selling author Isabelle Allende is a mission to bring relief to the suffering and a call to join the effort.*

Isabelle Allende is one of the most widely read novelists of our time. Her stories drive us to places we must see to understand, exploring cultural and physical diasporas and that beating heart of humanity, the family.

Writers show us the world in a way that opens our minds to new perspectives and helps us better understand ourselves through introspection and without personal risk. Books can shake us out of our complacency and challenge our emotions to mature. This was the calling Allende felt as she captured stories and served them up to her readers. And then, tragedy struck the writer. Her daughter, Paula Frias, contracted a rare disease, and Allende was left to grieve through the long process of losing her one breath at a time.

Grief is exhausting. Grief drains the creative reservoirs. After Paula's passing, Allende was left empty. No story could fill her soul the way her daughter had. Then, at the suggestion of a friend, she and her husband took a trip to India. The land of contrasts splashes colors on the palette; the people and their lives fill up the story bank. But it wasn't a new plotline Allende found. As they maneuvered their way in a rickety cab through the melee of traffic — buses, barrows, bicycles and one cow, they finally made their way to the countryside. Long stretches of natural landscape rolled out, sometimes curtained by the migrating haze of the city.

They came upon a group of women gathered to rest under a large tree. Allende and her husband approached them. At first, the Indian women were shy and backed away. But curiosity overcame them, and they came forward. Allende remembers the meeting vividly: "Lacking common language, we greeted each other with smiles and then they examined us with bold fingers, touching our clothing, our faces and the silver jewelry we had bought the day before. We took off the bracelets and offered them to the women, who put them on with delight. There were enough for everyone, two

or three each. One of the women, who could have been Paula's age, took my face in her hands and kissed me lightly on the forehead. I felt her parched lips, her warm breath, her smell. It was such an unexpected gesture, so intimate, that I couldn't hold back the tears."

What Allende didn't understand at first was that the mother was desperate and starving. She had a newborn and offered the baby to Allende to raise. It was an offering that rocked Allende. The transaction could not have taken place for a myriad of legal and ethical reasons. But the notion that a mother could hope so much for her daughter that she would give her away stuck with Allende. Returning home, Allende started a foundation to help impoverished women, inspired by the muse of her ever-present daughter who often said in difficult situations: "What is the most generous thing to do right now?"

In the process, Allende found her voice again — and soon returned to writing, as well.

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By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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