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# Chelsey: My True Story Of Murder, Loss, And Starting Over (Louder Than Words)



## Synopsis

Chelsey was death the unthinkable. When Her Only Surviving Parent, her beloved father, was violently murdered days before her fourteenth birthday, Chelsey's life was forever changed. As she was forced to come to terms with a new home life, a new school . . . a new identity as an orphan, Chelsey struggled to make sense of her personal tragedy. Yet she found a way to flourish despite all the odds. "I thought of myself in a new light: a girl, newly fourteen, standing in her dead father's study, all in black, a single tear streaming down her cheek. I was alone. My family told me again and again I was not, but without him, I was. I was no longer anyone's child." Because Truth Is More Fascinating Than Fiction

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Seventeen-year-old Chelsey Shannon is a junior at the School for Creative and Performing Arts in Cincinnati, OH, where she majors in creative writing. In addition to writing, she loves astrology, cooking, literature, playwriting, and psychology. She literally surrounds herself with books, working as a shelver at the The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

The Beginning I'll begin at the beginning. I was born to family who were overjoyed at my arrival. Deeply in love, my parents were a biracial coupleâ •my father, Blair, was black, and my mother,

Amy, white. My parents dated for eight years before they were married, and by that time, my mother's large, Catholic family had accepted my father as a surrogate brother and son. My parents worked well together, both as lovers and as business partners. In the years before I was born, my parents ran a comedy club in downtown Cincinnati called Aunt Maudie's. I was conceived shortly after the tragic death of my Aunt Kim in a car accident; a joy to balance a sorrow. My father filmed my mother's cesarean section and my subsequent birth. As my tiny, slippery self emerged from my mother, all he could say, with the utmost reverence, was, 'Oh, my God.' The first time my mother held me, she wept quietly. In watching the tape today, I can almost feel what she must have felt at that moment: relief, exhaustion, joy, awe, gratitude, and overwhelming love. After my birth, we moved to a growing suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio, called West Chester and built a red, brick house to live in. I remember exploring our budding home as it slowly emerged from the ground up, my parents planting a small garden in the front, selecting paint chips and carpet samples. Ours was one of the first homes in the area. Though my mother initially continued her work as a secretary during my early childhood, she soon decided to stay home with me, as, back then, my father spent much of his time on the road, staying in various cities as he pursued his career in stand-up comedy and music. Though she missed having him at home, my mother supported my father's endeavors, recognizing his talent. The first few years of my life went smoothly and safely. But things started to change by the time I reached kindergarten. When I was five years old, my mother was diagnosed with an acute form of leukemia, a cancer of the blood. Before my young eyes, the life was drained from my once vivacious and lovely mother, her face becoming pale and gaunt, her ebony hair thinning before giving way to baldness. By the time I started first grade, my mother was hospital-bound. By October of 1998, she was gone. My father was out of town when she died but asked my relatives who were staying with me to wait to tell me so he could break the news. As soon as he arrived home, he led me outside to the front porch of our house, and we gazed up at the velvety night sky, which was studded with stars that shone like diamonds. Deep in my heart, I knew what was coming. 'See that big, bright star up there?' my father asked gently, kneeling so he was beside me. I nodded. 'That's Mommy.' My worry confirmed, I clung to my father, beginning to cry. Though, in some ways, I'd known that my mother wasn't going to make it, I was still devastated that one of the most important people in my small world was gone. A few days later, as I sat among my first-grade classmates and listened to my teacher explain my family's tragedy in words and concepts we could understand, I began to feel my life would always be different from those of my classmates. •not necessarily less happy or functional, but definitely unconventional. The years that followed confirmed my suspicions. Despite being a fairly happy and conventional family following

the dark period of grief after my mother's death, there were still subtle nuances that distinguished me and my father from others in our community. The chief difference lay in my father's occupation. My father had transcended the realm of dingy clubs and hotels and begun to perform on cruise ships. He deeply enjoyed what he did and was quite successful at it. His work, however, made it necessary for him to leave me, his only child, roughly two weeks out of every month so he could perform at sea. This fact certainly didn't fit the mold of a typical suburban childhood. Unlike my friends, I didn't always have a welcoming parent to walk home to, a supportive face in the audience of a concert or recital, or a ride home from the bus stop in the rain. Even so, I had a fairly happy childhood and learned to adjust to my circumstances. While my father was away, I stayed with our neighbors, the Rouses, whose daughter, Holly, was only a year older than me. Because we were next-door neighbors, I was never far from my own home. By the end of my thirteenth year, I had established a reasonably simple rhythm to my life: dad gone, dad home, the Rouse's house, my own. But a week before my fourteenth birthday, my life was drastically uprooted. In my relatively short time on earth, I have learned that life, among many other things, is fully capable of taking detours from the path we envision for ourselves. These detours can be pleasant or traumatic, minor or deeply altering—but we all experience them, and we all must learn to deal with them. In my life, the detours took the form of the premature death of my parents. These circumstances have simultaneously been the most difficult and life-changing ones I've had to deal with. The early losses of my parents feverously spurred me on to a path of change, healing, and a deeper understanding of myself. Though the grief at my parents' deaths—my father's in particular—seemed insurmountable at times, it also initiated my quest of discovering who I truly am.

**Finding Out**

The day my life was altered irrevocably was an unsuspecting cold and gray January day. At school, I coasted thoughtlessly through my biology, language arts, and pre-algebra classes, distracted by thoughts of the weekend and my father coming home from his latest trip—a trip on which he'd brought his girlfriend, Monique, along. My only cause for concern was my failure to reach my dad earlier that morning, since he had told me the previous night I would be able to call him before I headed to school. However, by the end of the day, I was no longer worrying as I walked up the hill from my bus stop with the boy who lived down the street. We laughed, talking about nothing in particular. When we reached the top of the hill, he parted from me, and I said good-bye. As I turned toward my house, I registered the two cars in my driveway: my Aunt Chris's green one and my grandparents' gold one.

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HCI's Louder Than Words series features stories about serious issues from real teens who have experienced them. When she was in first grade, her mother died from leukemia. When she was 14, her father was murdered by a burglar in a hotel room. This is Chelsey Shannon's account of what happened next. Being a teen is all about exploring who you are and what you are going to be. Chelsey now feels she has no one who really knows or understands her. She barely exists, thinking and crying about her father. Chelsey's aunt moves in and tries to take care of her, but is stretched among several responsibilities. Another aunt has Chelsey fly out to the west coast with the possibility of staying out there. But Chelsey has always enjoyed writing, and is now doing it more than ever to help her with her grief. She learns about a school for creative teens back home and decides to return. This time, though, her old house has been sold, so she moves back in with her first aunt. A new school is not the entirely fresh start she is hoping for as she feels more alone than ever. She is biracial and was used to being in a predominately white area. This school is much more diverse, but Chelsey becomes shy and can't figure out how to fit in with any of the teens she meets. Even with therapy, she feels like she will never get over the desperate feeling of being orphaned. While dark, CHELSEY is more about Chelsey's journey out of the depths rather than a focus on the awful things that happened to her. Getting over such unthinkable tragedies is not as easy as it is often depicted in TV or the movies, and Chelsey's narrative is gripping in its first person account. She has respect for all those who try to help her get through her terrible time, and it is then with hope and maturity rather than bitterness and resentment that she emerges. Chelsey is powerful but not perfect, making her story relatable for anyone. --- Reviewed by Amy Alessio

The cover of this book is deceiving and deserves a better description (photo) of such a profound story. The childlike model on the cover does not resonate with what's inside. This is an incredible journey of a young girl who experiences the loss of both parents before she is 15 years old. Her story is compelling and uplifting and heartbreakingly honest. Her ability to describe how she handles these losses and not turn to medication is infectious. She is a very gifted young writer and we would like to see more of her work. Including her poetry. This is a must read for anyone who is struggling with accepting the death of a loved one. Turning her agony into art through this book is a gift to all who read it!

When Chelsey's father was violently murdered, days before her fourteenth birthday. She is now an

orphan and has no clue what to do. She is forced to come to terms with living with her aunt and the home life that comes with it. She also is starting a new school. Chelsey is also trying to make sense of what happened and how she got here. Despite all that happened, Chelsey finds a way to flourish. Chelsey's story was heartbreaking. I think that it would be impossible to visit that part of my life. I think that there could have been more to Chelsey's story. Her writing was lovely and well done. I enjoyed this book and recommend it.

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