



Never Tell Our Business to Strangers: A Memoir

By Jennifer Mascia

(Random House, \$26)

Reviewed by Katherine Burns Olson

Jennifer Mascia had a wild childhood. At 5 years old, her father was arrested by the FBI. By 28, both of her parents — her criminal dad and his protective wife, her loyal mother — had succumbed to vicious, fatal bouts of cancer. All that happens in between — the family's crisscrossing the country; their ferocious fights and bitter, latent secrets; their ultimately unbreakable bond — is what makes Jennifer's memoir, "Never Tell Our Business to Strangers," a humane, moving monument to the life and death of a most unusual family.

Chronicling the turbulent life she lived, unknowingly, on the lam, the author speaks raw truth to experiences that others with less nerve might not have the courage to relive, much less retell. Her father, whose arrests for murder and drug dealing injected equal parts fear and thrill into their transient lives, remains a beyond-all-odds beloved antihero, a tragic, romantic character whose love for his family, though tested by deception and division, is ever present in Jennifer's life. Though his choices — right and wrong — forever alter the course of the lives of those he holds most dear, his love for his family is what sustains them, and their story.

Drawing on her experience as a professional journalist and news assistant at The New York Times, Jennifer untangles the intricate knots of her family's shadowy history with both frankness and what must be sheer willpower. Her tale, though often unwieldy and at times disconnected, is revealing, a portrait of and confrontation with the vilest of truths with clarity, grace and a daughter's forgiveness.