

The Tie That Binds

Why daughters need to mend the relationship with their mother—now

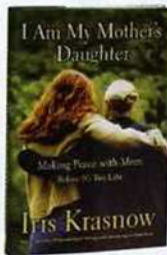
“I WRITE BOOKS THAT I need,” says best-selling author Iris Krasnow, 51. Her first book, *Surrendering to Motherhood*, grew out of her decision to give up a globetrotting reporting job with United Press International to stay home with her four young children. Likewise, her latest, *I Am My Mother's Daughter: Making Peace with Mom—Before It's Too Late* (Basic), grew out of her rocky relationship with her mother Helene. TIME'S **ANDREA SACHS** got together with Krasnow.

You write about the emotional impact your mother's declining health has had on you. How is she doing now?

She's on her last leg, literally. Two years ago, my mother had her leg amputated. She is very, very sick. But these last two years with her have been a century for me in terms of healing, completion, loving. The reason I wrote this book is that I was slapped into urgency to complete my relationship with my own mother. And like every mother and daughter—and maybe more so for us—it was a difficult, challenging relationship.

In what way was it difficult?

Well, my mother is a Holocaust survivor. She lost her entire family to Hitler's death camps, and her motto is, If Hitler didn't



get me, nothing can. So she's steely, although she has softened with age. Her house was run like a boot camp. She wasn't cuddly, really. She was just strong, hard, determined and not motherly in the classic sense.

So how have things changed between you as you have got older?

I don't get into it with my mother. In your 20s and 30s, if your mother tells you your hair is too long or your skirt is too short or your kids are slob, you get into it. You get riled. You might even call her a bitch. When the vein throbs in my neck about something my mother does or says, I pour myself a little glass of Cabernet Sauvignon, and I sit down, and I feel very blessed that I have her.

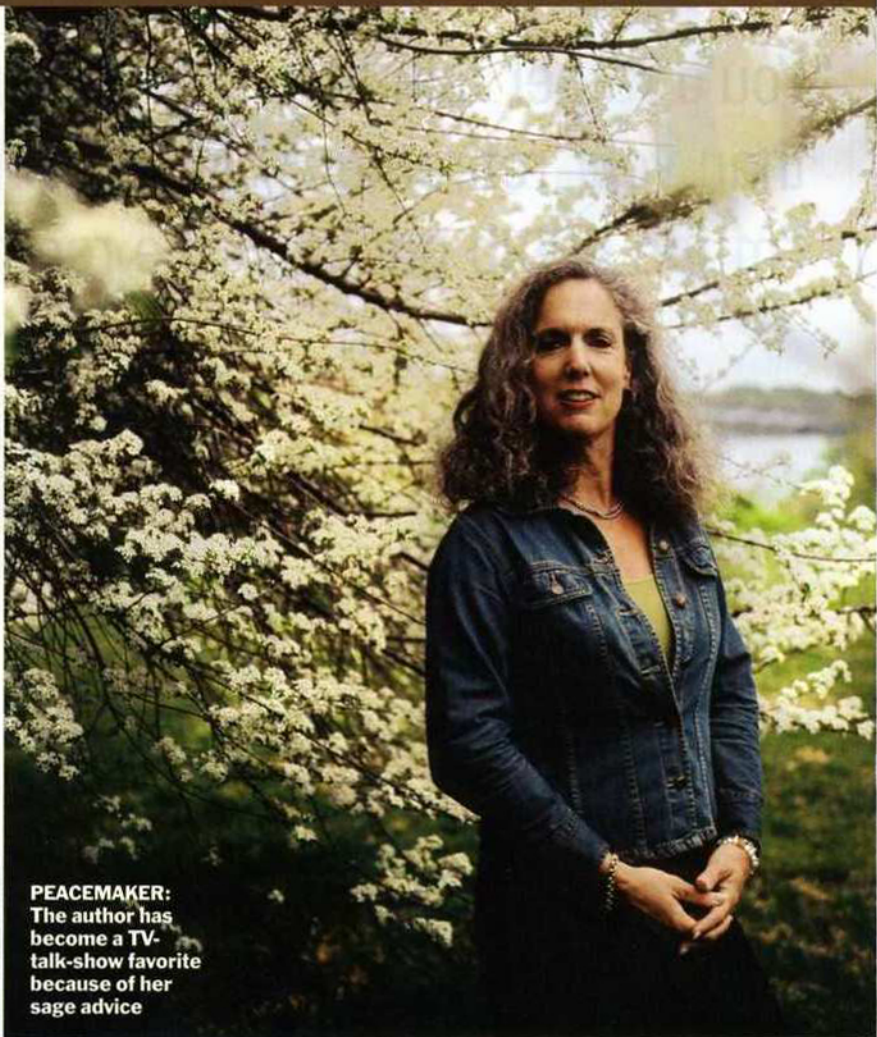
You interviewed 116 women about their relationship with their mother. Aren't there

relationships that are too damaged to fix?

You've got to work it out with your mother. Because whether you're with her or not, whether she's dead or alive, your mother sticks with you. I talked to a lot of women who didn't work it out, whose mothers had died. Those mothers are in their kitchens with them every single day. There's remorse. There's regret. You may as well work it out in this lifetime.

Aren't there mothers who have been so abusive that it's impossible to have a relationship?

One woman I interviewed grew up on a farm, and her mother used to beat her with a horsewhip. With a whip! That's the most horrific thing you can imagine. She's the prime example of, You can't forgive, but you can choose to forget. As this woman says, She's my mother, and I love her, and this is the most important thing, and I understand her history. I understand that she is doing to me what



PEACEMAKER: The author has become a TV-talk-show favorite because of her sage advice

was done to her. A lot of these abusive mothers were abused. I believe that if this woman who was beaten with a whip could work it out, most women could unless your mother took a bullet and killed someone you loved.

What do you do if your mother has already died and there are unresolved issues?

Let me tell you how people I spoke to whose mothers had died with unresolved relationships deal with it. They deal with it in therapy, they deal with it with a lot of pain, and it's never quite resolved. It's a hole in your heart that doesn't go away. I saw a lot of tears over a lot of kitchen tables all across America. So fix it while you can.

How?

When I'm talking with my friend who says, "I haven't seen my mother in

▼ NO HARD FEELINGS
Krasnow and her mother
Helene share a close moment
in a family photo taken in
2003



“I SAW A LOT OF TEARS over a lot of kitchen tables all across America. So fix it while you can.”—Iris Krasnow

years, and I don't care. I hate her,” I just say, You can't say you're sorry at the funeral. Just say it right now. “Well, I'm not sorry.” Well, say you're sorry even if you're not.

What's the value of that sort of apology?

What that does is bring you into this moment, this fleeting moment of relationship when all you have is now. I'm thinking how many delicious meals I've had with my mother over the past two years where we're just sitting and eating. All we're doing is being there. It's not about childhood issues that weren't perfect. It's not about issues in my 30s that weren't perfect. It's not about what I'll do when she dies. It's about that moment when it's perfect. It's a perfect moment, and it's available to all of us. But not for very long. ■