

WELCOME HOME

A Memoir with Selected Photographs and Letters

By Lucia Berlin and Jeff Berlin (editor)

176 pp. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2018.

Welcome Home is a collaboration between a deceased mother—the short-story writer Lucia Berlin (1936–2004)—and her adoring son Jeff Berlin. As editor, Jeff curates a triptych of escalating improvisation teetering on crisis and sustained by wit. First, Lucia's carefully crafted autobiographical essays, an unfinished manuscript covering 1936 to 1965. Second, Lucia's casual correspondence most to Black Mountain poet Ed Dorn, dated 1944 to 1965. Third, candid family photographs taken 1935 to 1962. We meet Lucia from her many short, tight remembrances of a peripatetic life in Juneau, Alaska (her birthplace), midwestern mining towns (her childhood with her engineer father and family), Albuquerque (her college years at the University of New Mexico), New York City and elsewhere (as a wife three times over, a mother of four, and a writer with a side hustle making children's ponchos). Her artistic milieu includes the denizens of Greenwich Village; the poet "Dennie" Levertov lives upstairs(!). We last hear Lucia's voice in the late 1980s, in a bonus insert cataloguing her varied residences and attendant nuisances, from zinnias that "wouldn't grow" (73) in Corrales, New Mexico, to "three weeks of rain[,] flood[, and] dysentery. [Son] Mark electrocuted" (73) in Acapulco. Lucia's star is ascending. The posthumous *A Manual for Cleaning Women: Selected Stories* was named one of *The New York Times Book Review's* Ten Best Books of 2015. In *Welcome Home* of 2018, Jeff Berlin, with fierce love and literary skill, has created a poignant resting place for his mother. —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 17 January 2021