

## In Giving I Connect with Others

by Isabel Allende

Novelist Isabel Allende was born in Peru and raised in Chile. When her uncle, Chilean President Salvador Allende, was assassinated in 1973, she fled with her husband and children to Venezuela. Allende has written more than a dozen novels, including *The House of the Spirits* and *My Invented Country*. Her most recent books include *Zorro: A Novel* and the final installment in her celebrated children's trilogy, *Forest of the Pygmies*.

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*All Things Considered*, April 4, 2005 · I have lived with passion and in a hurry, trying to accomplish too many things. I never had time to think about my beliefs until my 28-year-old daughter Paula fell ill. She was in a coma for a year and I took care of her at home, until she died in my arms in December of 1992.

During that year of agony and the following year of my grieving, everything stopped for me. There was nothing to do -- just cry and remember. However, that year also gave an opportunity to reflect upon my journey and the principles that hold me together. I discovered that there is consistency in my beliefs, my writing and the way I lead my life. I have not changed, I am still the same girl I was fifty years ago, and the same young woman I was in the seventies. I still lust for life, I am still ferociously independent, I still crave justice and I fall madly in love easily.

Paralyzed and silent in her bed, my daughter Paula taught me a lesson that is now my mantra: You only have what you give. It's by spending yourself that you become rich. Paula led a life of service. She worked as a volunteer helping women and children, eight hours a day, six days a week. She never had any money, but she needed very little. When she died she had nothing and she needed nothing. During her illness I had to let go of everything: her laughter, her voice, her grace, her beauty, her company and finally her spirit. When she died I thought I had lost everything. But then I realized I still had the love I had given her. I don't even know if she was able to receive that love. She could not respond in any way, her eyes were somber pools that reflected no light. But I was full of love and that love keeps growing and multiplying and giving fruit.

The pain of losing my child was a cleansing experience. I had to throw overboard all excess baggage and keep only what is essential. Because of Paula, I don't cling to anything anymore. Now I like to give much more than to receive. I am happier when I love than when I am loved. I adore my husband, my son, my grandchildren, my mother, my dog, and frankly I don't know if they even like me. But who cares? Loving them is my joy.

Give, give, give -- what is the point of having experience, knowledge or talent if I don't give it away? Of having stories if I don't tell them to others? Of having wealth if I don't share it? I don't intend to be cremated with any of it! It is in giving that I connect with others, with the world and with the divine.

It is in giving that I feel the spirit of my daughter inside me, like a soft presence.