

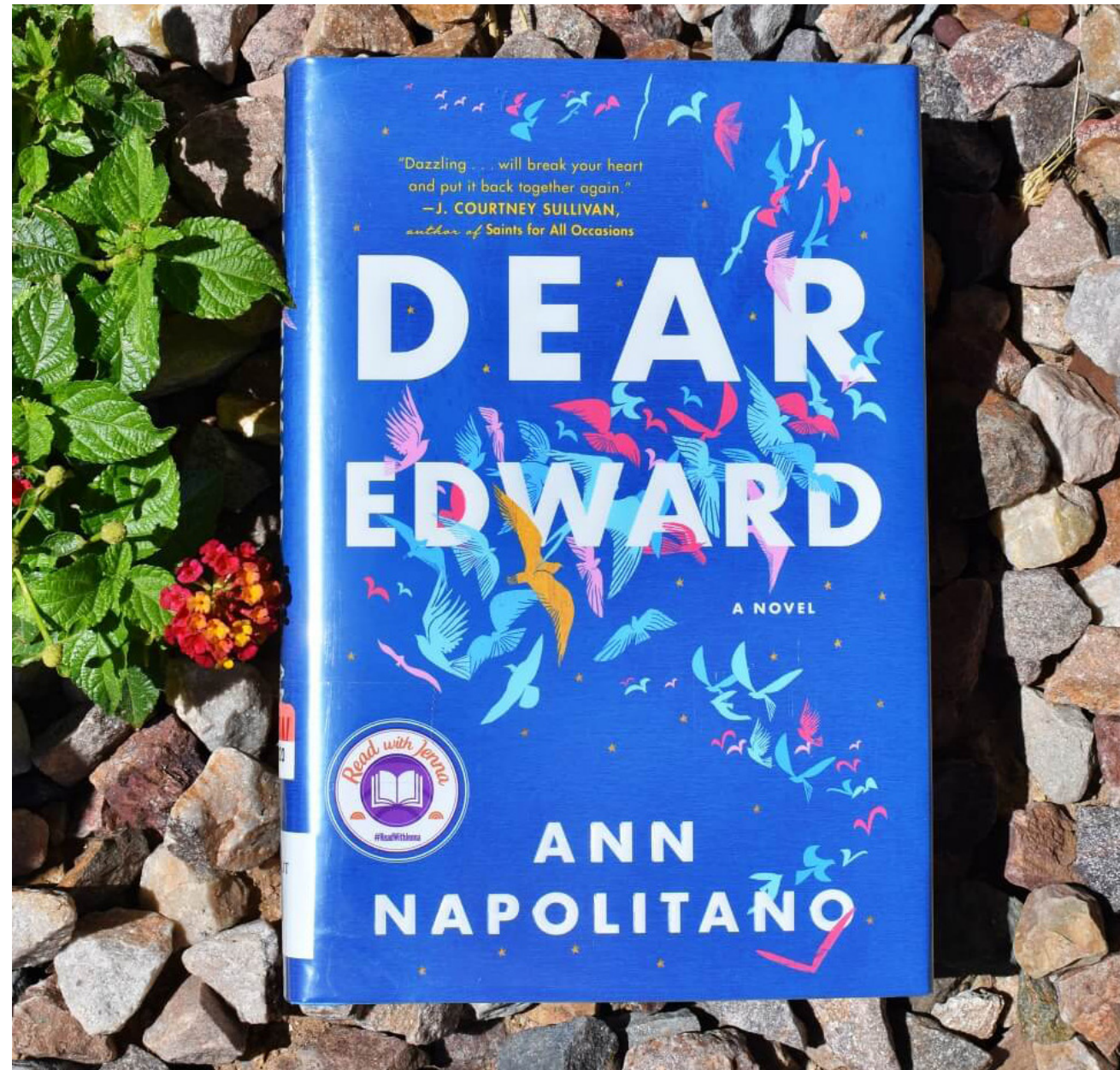
# Dear Edward by Ann Napolitano

Reviewed By Maria Kootsikis

**D**ear Edward is based on the true story of Ruben Van Assouw, the sole survivor of the 2010 crash of Afriqiyah Airlines Flight 711, which was caused by human error. Published in 2020, *Dear Edward* immediately made the *New York Times* bestseller list. Ann Napolitano's writing rings of intimacy as her characters take on real-life personas. In the book, 12-year-old Edward is the sole survivor when Flight 2977 crashes. All 183 other passengers aboard, including his parents and older brother Jake, perish in the crash. Edward lives but is badly hurt, mentally and physically. His body heals, but he now must figure out how to go on with life carrying such a burden. Jake and Edward were very close with no secrets between them, until Edward eventually learns otherwise. When he turns 16, Jake's age when he died in the crash, Edward starts wearing Jake's clothes.

Edward is immediately taken in and raised by his mother's sister and her husband, who are now mourning not only the loss of Edward's parents and brother but also of their unborn children recently lost to miscarriages. His aunt and uncle, now Edward's entire family, must figure out the best way to protect him from the media and the overbearing well-wishers. Ruben Van Assouw's family protected him so well from the media and without any knowledge about how he fared, the author modeled Edward and Jake after her two young sons.

Edward's uncle is a techie who monitors everything about the boy in the news and keeps track of such activity on his tablet. One day, Edward borrows his uncle's tablet, looks up his



uncle's notes on Flight 2977, and sees that there are 120,000 hits for himself and 40,000 for his brother Jake. Still reeling from this bit of information, Edward comes upon bags of letters, hidden away in the garage, that were written to him. He reads many of the letters with his best friend and next-door neighbor, Shay, who keeps records of the letters. Edward carefully chooses which letters to answer, which turns into a cathartic experience for him. He meets others who lost family members, which helps him to learn not to be defeated by what life has dealt him.

Similar to Edward and the real-life Ruben, Stephen Colbert, the youngest of 10 children, lost his father and two oldest brothers who were passengers aboard Eastern Airline flight 212 when it crashed in 1974. In an interview with Anderson Cooper, he explained how he learned to accept and not to be defeated by his suffering. I, too, think about the PSA 182 plane crash in 1978 over San Diego. A childhood girlfriend of mine, Andrea, was aboard the flight when pilot error caused it to crash. Andrea was 24 years old when she lost her life.

I can't imagine surviving a plane crash, being the only survivor, AND losing my entire immediate family. I can't even imagine what I would do if I lost a single family member in a plane crash. Even though the odds of dying in a motor vehicle accident (1/101) are far worse than in a plane crash (odds are too low to calculate), I still feel safer driving than flying. Maybe it's because I have no control over an airplane and I know 80% of airplane crashes are due to human error. In any event, I thoroughly enjoyed reading Ann Napolitano's prose as she poignantly captured how we must accept human loss to endure and survive.

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*Maria Kootsikis and her husband, both retired pharmacists, are living dream in beautiful Bluff Heights by the sea. They enjoy reading, international travel, and outdoor activities such as swimming, biking, and hiking.*