

The Sum of Our Days – A Memoir by Isabel Allende,  
translated from the Spanish by Margaret Sayers Peden.  
4<sup>th</sup> Estate 2008.

I only recently, to my shame, discovered the writings of Isabel Allende, though I had known of her for many years. The first of her books that I read was her take on the story of the legendary Zorro, and she wrote with such intelligence, so vividly and powerfully that I resolved to dive headlong into her sizable bibliography.

The Sum of Our Days, her latest book, is a letter to her daughter Paula, about whose death from porphyria-related complications she wrote in an eponymous memoir. It brings Paula up to date with everything that has happened since her death, and particularly the doings of her family, both blood and extended.

The cast of characters is huge, and as the story is principally set in California where Allende and her husband Willie live, many of them are the sort of people who legend suggests, and Allende bears out, are particularly drawn to the Sunshine State. The memoir is full of pain and loss, not just associated with Paula but also with Willie's errant daughter Jennifer, and the marital doings of the extended clan, but it also contains a lot of laughter.

Isabel Allende has an extraordinarily gifted family, and some devoted friends, among them the jeweller Tabra and the members of the Sisters of Perpetual Disorder and she seems to attract to herself those who are, in their own way, mirror images. Those of her family who wished to be included in the memoir she writes about with searing honesty and an abundance of love.

I finished The Sum of Our Days deeply moved by the story it tells, and certain that, while life with Isabel Allende would be exhausting, it would also be enormous fun!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh