



Title: The Book of Kehls

Author: Christine O'Hagan

Description:

When Bridget Moore left Ireland in 1865, she never suspected that along with her trunk and rosary beads, she was bringing Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy to New York City. It wasn't until Bridget was a grandmother, one who had buried four of her grandsons, that she realized she'd brought MD to the States, a disease that would haunt her family for generations. Years later, her great-grandchildren grew up under the elevated trains of Jackson Heights, Queens and one of them was Christine Kehl O'Hagan, the author of this moving and insightful memoir.

Christine, her sister Pam, and their brother Richie played in the streets and attended mass every Sunday. But Richie had trouble walking. By the time he was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, Christine learned that two of her mother's brothers uncles she'd never known about had died of MD. Christine eventually married and had a healthy son. But one day she saw her second boy, Jamie, struggle to climb onto the school bus and she knew then and there that this disease would be with her the rest of her life.

Extraordinarily written, with much honesty and humor, *The Book of Kehls* is the engaging story of a family that has known love, courage, and heartbreak in equal measure and survived.

Reviews

Kirkus Reviews:

The writer "takes her heart and squeezes until it purely aches" we said in our December 2004 review of this extremely painful yet sharply poignant memoir. O'Hagan chronicles her attempts to help her son, Jamie, live with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Her realization that Jamie will likely die in his 20s, and her subsequent decision to make him confront his mortality head-on -- or, as she writes, "he shouldn't worry about how long, but instead, how deep" -- is an astounding revelation. "Emotions come off the page like radioactive waves," we said. "Rarely is a memoir so worth the terrible effort." Predictably, many readers have been scared off by the difficulty of the subject, according to St. Martin's Press publicity manager Dori Weintraub, who is also O'Hagan's editor. "It's about Muscular Dystrophy, and a lot of people don't want to face that kind of thing," she says. While Weintraub notes that it has been a challenge to make readers understand that the book transcends the genre of inspirational writing, she's still hopeful it may find a broader, more literary audience. "It's worth it for the writing -- the sheer beauty of Christine's sentences."

Booklist:

Shortly after the Civil War, Bridget Moore left Ireland for New York with very little extra in her trunk -- a pair of rosary beads, a clay pipe. But a dangerous invisible

passenger accompanied her. She carried the gene that causes Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a wasting disorder affecting the legs, arms, and hips in young males. This unexpected curse is the dominant motif of O'Hagan's poignant, luminous, devastatingly moving memoir of her family and its long, courageous fight with a deadly disease. This is also a story of survival, perseverance, and hope, lit by great humanity and even humor.

Entertainment Weekly:

What shines through is O'Hagan's clear-eyed honesty, mordant humor, and most of all, love of God and family that provided her emotional strength.

Newsday:

It's hard to imagine one family bearing so much pain, but O'Hagan brings us unflinchingly into her world, showing us both the love and the heartbreak without a shred of sentimentality.

Library Journal:

This intense memoir vividly depicts the impact of a fatal genetic disease on one family ... O'Hagan's clearly written narrative is refreshingly free of self-pity and may offer solace and strength to families facing a devastating illness.