

50 Miles

Sheryl St. Germain

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"I am always writing as an alcoholic," Sheryl St. Germain says in the introduction to her brave, moving memoir in twenty-nine movements, *50 Miles*. Its pieces range from lyrical essays to prose poems and fragmented excerpts—episodes that capture the deep grief of losing a child to addiction while also trying to remain in recovery oneself.

St. Germain, who has been in recovery since 2010, has a unique perspective. Her family history is bound up in addiction; she was "doomed" to develop an addiction to alcohol and other substances. Unlike her father and brothers, though, she escaped from active use. Her son, Gray, did not make it to recovery.

50 Miles shares the struggles of raising a son with substance use disorder and the pain of losing him to an overdose. St. Germain frames her son's loss in spiritual terms and against the backdrop of the national drug epidemic, and hers becomes a profound story about enduring unimaginable pain.

The book's four sections include memories of Gray's childhood, St. Germain's own substance use and recovery, and life after losing her son. Pieces are written in first, second, and third persons, resulting in a tender, often wounded, omniscience. The tone is lyrical but heavy, with a faint glimmer of hope that there is life after loss.

St. Germain recounts her memories of recovery with the clarity and discipline of a writer who is accustomed to being fearless with her subjects. However, her command of literary craft does not obscure the pain she feels. Her sentences are clean; she writes with detached compassion about substance use, death, and anger. While many other addiction-related memoirs veer into sanctimoniousness or frothy emotional appeals, *50 Miles* sticks close to the heart, to the bone, to the deepest truths.

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