

For Goodness' Sake: The Story Behind the Saint James 9/11 Bereavement Support Group

Pamela Koch

Archway Publishing (Apr 15, 2019)

Softcover \$17.99 (266pp)

978-1-4808-6976-9

For Goodness' Sake is a moving memoir of a faith community's path to healing after September 11th.

Pamela Koch's inspirational memoir *For Goodness' Sake* is about grief and healing after September 11th, 2001.

In the wake of September 11th, Koch, an experienced grief counselor, had the opportunity to start a group to help people in her suburban community deal with the grave losses they'd faced. Her book relates how the group formed, covers its time together, and shows how its legacy lives on.

Many September 11th stories have been told, and this one has some familiar elements: Koch hearing the news on television and becoming frantic as she tracked down family and friends, for example. Koch shares poignant personal experiences, including a feeling of peace when visiting Ground Zero in protective gear during the cleanup and a request to the mayor to keep some ashes from the site for grieving families who had no bodies to bury. These memories bolster the story about the support group's beginnings and how it transformed lives in the first few years after September 11th.

Elements from Koch's life, including her experiences leading up to September 11th and her health crises before and after the tragedy, are included. This backstory results in a slow pace as the work moves toward the support group, ostensibly its main focus. Koch's experiences and familiarity with loss are well established, though, and they make the impact of events all the more poignant.

Highlighting behind-the-scenes planning, Koch shows that careful thought went into the group. As the challenges of the group grew, practical ideas like making memory boxes with children and using kickboxing to help deal with anger arose. A look at grief counseling as a profession includes setting an atmosphere for healing, which doesn't happen by accident. Helpful ideas like the three "C's"—Commitment, Confidentiality, and Crying—are imparted.

A warm and emotionally intelligent narration conveys wisdom and empathy. Koch is honest in discussing grief, though her outlook stays positive, and faith also plays in. Issues of Christian calling are incorporated in the discussions, demonstrated in how group volunteers worked to approach people in a way that echoed Jesus's compassion. Reflections from others, and stories of group members transforming their grief into action, add texture.

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MELISSA WUSKE (August 20, 2019)

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