Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Grace, Miracles, and Chocolate: Conceived by Gang Rape, Husband Murdered, Son Committed Suicide; Can God Really Work All Things Out for Good?

Marriott Cole
InspiringVoices
978-1-4624-0188-8
Four Stars (out of Five)

Devout Christian Marriott Cole's compelling memoir draws in secular and religious readers alike.

Although primarily written for those struggling with their Christian faith, *Grace, Miracles, and Chocolate* will also appeal to anyone who likes memoirs of triumph over adversity.

Abused and underfed by a violent alcoholic mother, Marriott Cole nonetheless thrived through to adulthood thanks to a supportive network of friends and relatives. The author's matter-of-fact narration of her troubles allows readers to empathize deeply with her. Of her son's suicide, she remarks, "Knowing that my son is safely with Jesus has taken a huge burden off of me. I also gave my guilt of being so ignorant of Stephen's feelings to the Lord." Regardless if readers are faithful or secular, all will glean much from the way in which Cole uses incidents in her life, big and small, to illustrate the importance of letting go.

For believers, Cole quotes one or more Biblical passages in each chapter, and these verses mesh well with the topics at hand. Often these verses stress the importance of humility and kindness—amazing acts of which are peppered throughout the book, such as the neighbor who brings a meal to the parents of the man who slew the author's husband.

Most of the characters—the author's family of origin, her children, and her murdered husband—become fully realized people to the audience. Because readers feel like they know most of Cole's family, they feel the loss with her when her brother and her first husband perish. Son Stephen's suicide, however, loses impact because Cole only tells readers about him after he dies, so they are not invested in his story until it is too late. Despite this misstep in storytelling,

the author enhances her autobiography through the judicious use of black-and-white photographs, allowing readers to see the key players in her life.

Cole's ability to fill her story with attention-getting dialogue makes readers feel as though they are reliving her life along with her. Her retelling of happenings that she believes to be heavenly miracles—from getting a check in the mail to the disappearance of her daughter's hearing problems—will strengthen the faith of Christian audience members and leave everyone curious to know what happens next. The short chapters only make the book even harder to put down. The author makes sure to give context for things she hasn't mentioned in a while by saying things such as, "You might recall from chapter 7," to help reorient readers.

Wrapped in a cover depicting a delectable tower of fudge, *Grace* offers treats for everyone.

Jill Allen