

Kick-Ass Kinda Girl: A Memoir of Life, Love, and Caregiving

Kathi Koll

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Kick-Ass Kinda Girl is an entertaining roller coaster of a memoir whose second half will be particularly pertinent to caregivers.

From being childhood friends with Lucille Ball's daughter to becoming acquainted with President George W. Bush, Kathi Koll has led a star-studded life in Los Angeles, Missouri, and across the world. Yet the main subject of her memoir, *Kick-Ass Kinda Girl*, is not her celebrity-filled adventures but her time caring for her husband, Don, who suffered a stroke and spent several years recovering from locked-in syndrome. Koll's story is inspirational, capturing the emotional ups and downs of caring for oneself while caring for another.

The first half of the memoir details Koll's life up through Don's stroke. She grew up in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s, in the age of *I Love Lucy* and *The Dating Game*. With two successful brothers twenty years older than her, Koll had great influences to look up to. She befriended the children of actors in school, as well as those who grew up to become famous themselves (she briefly dated Mark Harmon). Though she had acting ambitions, she only ever performed in commercials. She wound up marrying her college sweetheart, Patrick, moving to Missouri for his work, and having three children in her early twenties.

Around this time, both of her parents and her oldest brother, Arthur, were suffering from various illnesses; they died within a short time frame. Here begins the book's overarching theme: navigating heartbreaking loss while retaining one's sense of self at the same time.

Soon after her divorce from Patrick, Koll met a real estate developer, Don, who took her to a White House event for their first date. Their whirlwind romance carried on like a Hollywood dream: a surprise wedding, a move to the French Riviera. But tragedy struck when Don had a stroke, and Koll dropped everything to make sure that he received the best possible care.

Often comparing Don's situation to that of Jean-Dominique Bauby of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, Koll details Don's medical needs and how the doctors helped her integrate his new accommodations into their life. She writes in clear, casual language, as if she were a friend telling her story over drinks, and has an entirely likable and humble voice despite her unusual lifestyle and name-dropping habits. Koll's text aims to inspire other caregivers to maintain a positive attitude by providing those in their care with all the luxuries and adventures that they enjoyed prior to their accidents or illnesses, though Koll graciously acknowledges the atypical privilege that her and Don's wealth afforded them.

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AIMEE JODOIN (August 17, 2018)

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