

Logjam of a Beauteous Mind: An Infinitely Gentle Woman

Peter Simon Karp

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The heartrending memoir Logjam of a Beauteous Mind is a humane account of a couple's love for each other.

Peter Simon Karp's memoir *Logjam of a Beauteous Mind* concerns his care for his wife during her time with cancer.

Karp left his tech job to take care of his wife, Mona, following her terminal diagnosis. In his book, he recounts how he helped his wife cope with the foggy and frustration of her "logjam chemo brain." She fell ill on a trip to England and fought to survive, even after being dropped from an experimental but promising clinical trial.

Bare and emotional, the book includes raw descriptions of the devastation of the initial diagnosis, the couple's fears for their future, and the pain Mona felt while dealing with circumstances like a collapsed lung and degenerative emaciation. Poignant scenes recall Karp choking back sobs, his mind a blank; he's seen praying as well. Through these intimate moments, the book telegraphs a bigger picture, too, emphasizing facts such as that lung cancer is the deadliest cancer in the United States.

Filtered through the sieve of Karp's perspective, though, this account of dealing with cancer also goes on tangents. It features scenes in which blackbirds are said to warn of coming blizzards and others set on Bastille Day; it muses on the work of Hemingway and on movies. In the end, some such anecdotes distract from its emotional center, removing attention from Karp's wife and her harrowing experiences. Still, Mona is realized in full, and the spouses' tango amid the shadow of the looming tragedy is strong.

Powerful and clear phrasing is used to capture moments, as when Mona described the "weights and measures" of the growing cancer cells in her lungs. The text is candid, crafted with precision, and searing in its resonance. Its recalled conversations are variously authentic sounding and too stylized, though.

Organized in a chronological fashion, the book moves from the gut punch of the initial diagnosis to Mona's slow decline, noting every indignity in between the two moments. It's a logical approach that mirrors the progression of disease. Karp's efforts to provide palliative care, cast around in desperation for any potential cause or cure, and venerate his wife escalate into a crescendo of sorrow and mourning.

Forceful and heartrending, the memoir *Logjam of a Beauteous Mind* is a humane account of a couple's love for each other in the shadow of the wife's looming death.

JOSEPH S. PETE (January 5, 2021)

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