

## Memory That Claws: Nine Stories from My Ninety Years

**Peter Simon Karp**

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*Memory That Claws is an affirming memoir about overcoming a haunting childhood through family love.*

Peter Simon Karp's compact memoir *Memory That Claws* is about his aspirations to be a baseball player, which changed when he found his true calling in family life.

The book is most concerned with preserving those memories that affected Karp's "most profound decisions and actions." Thus, his childhood is covered in terms of how he reacted to tough experiences, showing him developing a fighting spirit and being willing to take risks. He grew up in the 1940s outside of New York, where his Russian immigrant family members were the only Jewish people around. His grandfather's farm was targeted by menacing, antisemitic German Bundsmen; also in his childhood, a war game that he played with his friends ended in a fatality.

Karp's repeated traumas left him with a stutter. Baseball became his most reliable avenue for proving himself—even though one summer camp game ended in a vicious fight that was almost covered by a newspaper. Indeed, his experiences left scars that were hard to heal. In adulthood, such damage was challenged by Karp's love for his wife and their sons, which soothed his impulse to defend himself. He also took care of his ailing grandfather. The book enumerates the lessons that Karp learned as he aged, leading him to "rewrite" his takeaways from some of his childhood stories.

The prose is musing, and its thoughtful tone is well paired with the evocative descriptions that arise throughout the book—of the menacing facial features and clothing of those who harassed Karp's family, for example; or of impressions gathered on the way to a baseball tryout, as of the quiet of the morning and the sounds of children playing. And the book's most immediate scenes are given added depth through Karp's internal reflections, as with a conversation he had with the father of the boy who died: Karp's unspoken feelings of anxiety and empathy are preserved, as is his awareness of the man's controlled tone and his own struggle to find the right words. But because the book is so driven by its impulse to show the multiple ways that memories "claw" at a person, its pace becomes too slow. And some memories repeat across multiple chapters—in particular, those memories that relate to Karp's grandparents—losing a bit of their power each time they're returned to.

*Memory That Claws* is an affirming memoir about overcoming a haunting childhood through family love.

MARI CARLSON (October 23, 2023)

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