

Mending My Mind

Sara Church

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Sara Church's memoir *Mending My Mind* is about recovering from childhood trauma while navigating the process of becoming a parent.

Throughout her adult life, Church struggled with sustaining romantic relationships. Her difficulties culminated in a divorce from her wife, Elizabeth, at the age of forty-two. They had planned to start a family. Church, who had always wanted to be a mother, opted to pursue motherhood alone now. She believed that she would never be able to maintain a successful long-term partnership. Her pursuit was coupled with the eerie rediscovery of letters she'd written to her murdered childhood friend.

Church began trauma therapy to address her fear of intimacy and her PTSD. And at the same time that she and her therapist dissected the origins of her childhood trauma, Church started her fertility treatments. Her story is one of building new relationships and repairing old ones, all in the pursuit of providing a nourishing environment for her child.

Deliberate and analytical, the book is organized to match the progression of Church's therapy; its chapters are organized by theme. Flashbacks to her early life cover her coming out, her mother's arrest, and her repressed memory of a shooting; these are delineated at opportune times, with their contents disclosed to align with the unfolding sessions. The struggles of Church's first open lesbian relationships, for instance, are discussed in tandem with the coping mechanisms she used when dealing with unwanted emotions surrounding relationship stressors.

Strong and forthright, the prose evinces self-awareness and deep introspection. It outlines Church's faults with honesty and a critical eye, but still conveys empathy concerning her trauma. Over the course of the book, Church develops from an anxious, standoffish workaholic into a more balanced, mindful mother, daughter, and partner. In tandem with this personal evolution, the book becomes more approachable and friendly, too.

Astute rhetorical questions and conversational turns of phrase balance out the book's reigning sense of practicality. It is clear in depicting Church's therapy experiences, sharing her precise emotions during flashbacks and therapy sessions. Her nine-year-old fear at seeing her mother in jail is as tangible as the guilt and heartbreak that followed from her divorce, as well as her overwhelming adoration of her newborn son. Emotional highs partner with academic approaches to trauma recovery, resulting in a balanced, moving narrative.

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AIMÉE JODOIN (November 23, 2021)

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