

Siren, On Repeat: What My Best Friend's Death Taught Me About Hope and Grief

Patti Kimball

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Practical methods for managing long-term grief are named in the memoir Siren, on Repeat, the story of an ebullient friendship cut short by death.

Patti Kimball writes about losing her best friend to heart disease when both girls were teenagers and about how she continues to manage her grief as an adult in her memoir *Siren, on Repeat*.

In suburban Canada in the 1980s, Kimball became best friends with Aprile, a girl with a congenital heart disease. While Aprile's condition was acknowledged, she and her friends led normal lives, attending parties, going to dance clubs, and partaking in usual modes of fun. These carefree moments were interrupted when Kimball heard ambulance sirens screaming down her street. The heart disease had taken Aprile's life in a swift, unexpected manner, and Kimball struggled to manage her grief.

The memoir is split into two distinct parts. In its first half, the tone is youthful and innocent, focused on capturing the importance of friendship in adolescence and Kimball's difficulties with facing adult realities while still in high school. It is driven by anecdotes, recalled conversations, and heartfelt descriptions of Kimball and Aprile's close friendship, which was undiminished by Aprile's health challenges.

The second half of the book shifts in tone, covering the aftermath of Aprile's death. It is more reflective and grown up, with its prose dedicated to analyses and explanations of life lessons. One of the first of these lessons is that most people are uncomfortable with talking about death and that this discomfort can stultify the reception of meaningful support. When facing such issues, the book advises others to know that there is "no time limit when offering acknowledgement and support; it's never too late."

In both parts of the book, the prose is forthright and uncluttered. Its structure matches the story's actions and tones, with longer sentences devoted to more reflective passages. However, Kimball's emotional states are described as abstractions, without fresh imagery, even in the several poems that are included in the book.

Still, Kimball ably describes the circular natures of grief and its related emotions, including guilt, blame, and regret. Strategies for managing these emotions are named in the context of events particular to her tale, with the book's lessons embedded in her distinctive experiences. It names ways that Kimball kept her own memories alive, created space for emotional release, and leaned on friends—comforting, familiar examples that are grounded in specificity.

Siren, on Repeat is an elegiac memoir about an ebullient friendship cut short by death—and about practical methods for managing long-term grief.

MICHELE SHARPE (July 18, 2022)

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