Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

We Carried the Mat: My Faith Journey as a Primary Caregiver . . . and How a Community Made All the Difference

Katie Jordan
WestBowPress
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Four Stars (out of Five)

The New Testament Gospel of Mark includes a story about four devoted friends who carry a paralyzed man to Jesus for healing, only to be halted by a crowd. Undaunted, the men "dug through the clay roof … [and] lowered the sick man on his mat, right in front of Jesus." Katie Jordan uses this story to frame her memoir about caring for her terminally ill husband, *We Carried the Mat: My Faith Journey as a Primary Caregiver … and How a Community Made All the Difference*. Although its overt Christianity may initially deter some readers, the practical and emotional wisdom she offers to caregivers will amply compensate for individual religious differences.

Jordan's husband, Jay, was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), an incurable disease that causes slow nerve deterioration, resulting in paralysis and death. As Jordan struggled to face the disease "that invaded our lives like a thief," she realized that the happy, active life she had taken for granted had been snatched away. She left a job she loved and traded her beloved home for a much smaller single-story house modified to accommodate Jay's increasing disability. An appendix lists Jordan's experience-based suggestions for home modifications.

In honor of the "mat carriers" who accompanied Jordan and Jay during the prolonged ordeal of Jay's illness and death, this book shares their many contributions and offers a model for how communities can support those caring for the sick and dying at home. Jordan writes frankly about her despair as Jay's condition worsened, and her honesty about the strain, isolation, and fear that caregivers experience is at the heart of this book. When her pastor gave a sermon on the mat carriers and praised Jay's church attendance, Jordan seethed with silent resentment because he did not mention the hours of grueling labor she had devoted to getting

him there. In desperation, she wrote to her pastor and “boldly suggested that he had missed the point of his own message … Carrying Jay’s mat alone was becoming impossible. I needed prayer and practical help to carry Jay’s mat to Heaven’s gate.”

We Carried the Mat conveys a clear, earnest message about the role of caregivers. Its sincerity and insight negate Jordan’s occasionally clumsy phrasing and strained metaphors. Her intent is to help rather than to entertain, and in this, she easily succeeds. Readers will appreciate Jordan’s ability to transcend her particular situation to encourage everyone to assist the mat carriers who perform extraordinary labor in times of need.

Elizabeth Breau