



I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl

Kelle Groom

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At the age of fifteen, Kelle Groom found that alcohol allowed her to connect with people and explore intimacy in ways she'd never been able to experience before. She began drinking before class, often blacked out at bars, and fell into destructive relationships. At nineteen, already an out-of-control alcoholic, she was pregnant. Accepting the heartbreaking fact that she was incapable of taking care of her son herself, she gave him up for adoption to her aunt and uncle. They named him Tommy and took him home with them to Massachusetts. When he was nine months old, the boy was diagnosed with leukemia—but Kelle's parents, wanting the best for her, kept her mostly in the dark about his health. When Tommy died he was only fourteen months old. Having lost him irretrievably, Kelle went into an accelerating downward spiral of self-destruction. She emerged from this free fall only when her desire to stop drinking connected her with those who helped her to get sober.

In stirring, hypnotic prose, *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* explores the most painful aspects of Kelle's addiction and loss with unflinching honesty and bold determination. Urgent and vital, exquisite and raw, her story is as much about maternal love as it is about survival, as much about acceptance as it is about forgiveness. Kelle's longing for her son remains twenty-five years after his death. It is an ache intensified, as she lost him twice—first to adoption and then to cancer. In this inspiring portrait of redemption, Kelle charts the journey that led her to accept her addiction and grief and to learn how to live in the world.

Through her family's history and the story of her son's cancer, Kelle traces with clarity and breathtaking grace the forces that shape a life, a death, and a literary voice.

I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl Details

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From Reader Review I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl for online ebook

Jeana says

First off, I was nearly scared off from reading this because of the low overall goodreads rating, but I'm so glad I took a chance on it. In fact, the language—as the title is—is poetic and beautiful. While Groom is writing about gritty and difficult things, the beautiful writing softens it and keeps you moving forward. But what really propels this story along is the constant longing and hunger to grieve. Because she hadn't allowed herself to grieve, she feels unloved and unable to love others. The only thing she can love is the idea of her son who had been brought up (to a young age of 14 months) by her aunt and uncle and died of leukemia.

I sometimes feel like people don't like reading about others grieving because it makes them uncomfortable or just plain depressed, but the problem (or the beauty, you decide) is that we NEED to write about our grief. Our most difficult trials are what inspire us to create. I wept like a baby at the end of the book when Groom finally allowed herself to talk to her aunt and uncle, to say Tommy's name aloud, to get answers to all her unanswered questions about who her little boy was. When she let herself become a part of him and not just lurking on the outside as she always felt.

The events jump around, a lot, throughout the novel, which can feel a little jarring. But I liked how it mirrored her alcoholism, her drunkenness and her grief. I could see the story going forward despite the dizzying timeline. Oh, and I loved how it kept going back to the ocean theme time and again.

This beautifully written memoir isn't for everyone, though: a lot of language and sexually explicit material. While I think this is closer to a 4-star rating for me, I'm giving it 5 because I don't feel that the 3.22 goodreads average is fair.

A quote I loved:

"No one has ever held me so tightly. It's a shock to matter this much. It isn't like arms are around me, it's more like a house, as if he has made a house around me. As he did around Tommy."

Kathy Hiester says

I love memoirs and this memoir was written by a poet. *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* was not a simple read. The tale surges from different time frames with reliability. The book tells the story of an alcoholic, through her treatment and relapse. However, most the narrative involves the son she gave up for adoption who son dies very young from leukemia and how this affects her alcoholism. Although I found the subject matter hard to read, the words themselves were stunning. It's easy to see the poet coming through and it is definitely worth reading.

5 Stars

Bonnie says

I really did want to like this. I picked it up due to the beautiful cover and captivating title--I read the first few chapters in-store and my interest was piqued.

However, I was just not into this. I read a couple of the reviews and one mentioned the choppy nature of the narrative. I think that was just my problem; it was very difficult for me to get a grasp on the space and time of any particular chapter. It was difficult to sort out what happened when. Perhaps this was the writer's intention, but I became frustrated with the book.

There is an interesting story about an interesting life in here, but, especially when coupled with the writing style, it wasn't one I could really relate to,

Shaindel says

I've been familiar with Kelle's poetry from her first two collections and have always loved her work. When we were both active in Florida's writing community, I heard Kelle read a poem about her son, which was heartbreaking, so when I heard she was writing this memoir, I couldn't wait to read it.

This is possibly the best memoir I've ever read. Absolutely breathtaking and emotionally raw. A must-read.

I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl is one of those books that has probably changed the way I'll look at my life, and I think I'll be a better person for it.

Denise says

This book was a rambling, tense, tragic memoir of a poet, Kelle Groom. She dashes back and forth rapidly through several decades. At times, this format was difficult to follow. For me, this book was very depressing. Perhaps this rambling represents her bouts of alcoholism, loss, death, and abuse. It appears to be a very honest memoir.

Gabriel Avocado says

i really had to push myself to finish this one. its written in a dreamy sort of poetic prose that is fun to write but irritating to read. i had no idea what was going on, and i guess thats intentional, but i really dislike not knowing whats going on.

there is very graphic talk of rape in the book and it kind of comes out of nowhere so if youve a survivor i suggest skipping this one altogether, as it was extremely upsetting.

i didnt like this much.

Kyla says

hauntingly beautiful. Kelle Groom is a poet and it shows in this memoir. Her story is so riddled with heartbreak and the ending is... almost unbearable. But she writes with so much vulnerability that it is impossible to finish this book without feeling an incredible amount of love for this woman who has put herself out there for all to see, even her darkness.

Flatfoot Vertigo says

I was disappointed in Groom's book. As a person in recovery, I was looking for something well written that would give me hope and inspiration. In the preface, or some review, there was praise for the way the book moved about in time from chapter to chapter. I have read books that do this artfully; this book seemed to just need editing. I was confused by the abrupt changes rather than intrigued.

I also found the poetic license taken in the prose writing a little distracting.

There is a section where she discusses having stayed in a colleague's home while he was out of the country or the state. She states that he was angry when he returned because she hadn't taken good care of the place. This all happened well after she was through her big troubles, so I was disappointed to see that she was disrespectful to someone who let her stay in his home free. When we write a recovery book, we want to inspire people in recovery with how we've improved, so this section made me scratch my head. There was no discussion of why she did not take care of the place, as if it didn't matter.

I felt the book petered out at the end and devolved into an extended exercise in grief over a child - such that the book seemed to swerve from one theme, recovery from addiction, to another, recovery from grief over a child.

I just found the book fragmented and confusing, and anticlimactic. I wish I had better things to say about it. The title is quite interesting.

RD Morgan says

An incredibly brave memoir. Touches on both the stigma of being a woman alcoholic as well as the troublesome issues women alcoholics must go through during their journey toward sobriety. Groom is an Alcoholics Anonymous advocate, but she writes about it in such a way that will not repel readers who do not share her feelings for AA.

Fans of Caroline Knapp's *Drinking: A Love Story* will enjoy this book.

Laurie says

Where to begin? Perhaps with the title. It points not only to this memoir's dual settings of Florida and Massachusetts, but also to Groom's associative, imagistic, and lyrical style.

My thoughts:

In this memoir, style marries inextricably with substance. Groom brings us so close in to her psyche and to her thoughts, strung together from image to image, event to non-contiguous event, that we feel we almost are her, and intensely present within her for the unpredictable shift of emotions that we all experience from moment to moment, but often don't record so literally, so unfiltered. It's rare to find a narrator taking this risky and intimate stance, and it pays off here with an intensity of experience I've not encountered in a long time.

As I read, I was reminded of that unmoored feeling of adolescence, when you're experiencing moments - sometimes transcendent, but often dangerous too, as your judgment waxes and wanes, your risk-taking ebbs and flows - but you have few labels for what's happening in your head, and perhaps don't even need those labels. Image melts into image, moment into moment into memory and back. That's the feel of this gritty, emotionally challenging - even draining - yet luminous memoir from prize-winning poet Kelle Groom.

Who would benefit by or be a natural fit for this brand-new book? People who gravitate toward memoirs with intense emotional issues at their core, poets and writers, people who would enjoy visiting the settings of Florida beach towns and Massachusetts industrial towns (they're not the focus, but these settings do play an substantive role in Groom's explorations and development).

For a more detailed review, visit me at <http://whatsheread.blogspot.com/2011/...>

Mary (BookHounds) says

What a devastating and miraculous story that Kelle Groom recounts about her history as an alcoholic through short essays that reflect her poetic background. The book goes into detail about why she drank and how she needed to drink to feel that she was alive and connect with people. Other drugs didn't work for her the way alcohol did. She further spirals downward after she becomes pregnant at nineteen, gives the baby up for adoption to her aunt and then the child dies from leukemia. Through all of this mayhem, she still retains her voice to tell the story of her life. Her parents stick by her and try to get her help through out her ordeals with alcohol while remaining silent about their own issues and her father's ill health.

I did like this book even though it was a difficult read and I had to take breaks in between each chapter. You can imagine that the journals Groom wrote were somehow infused with the alcohol she drank at times. There is a bit of skipping around in the timeline which made it easier for me to read this one chapter at a time and digest it as I went along. I am so glad the Groom slowly comes to terms with what happened to her in her life and survived devastating things like her rape, the loss of her son and the sadness that really enveloped her life. There is redemption at the end!

L_manning says

This book is a memoir. It was written by a poet, and it's easy to see that in the writing. This was not an easy read by any means. The narrative flows from point in time to point in time with regularity. The book tells the story of an alcoholic, through her treatment and relapse(s). However, most the narrative involves the son she gave up for adoption to her aunt and uncle. Her son dies very young of leukemia, and her desire to reconnect with this missing part of her self directs her actions throughout her life.

Honestly, I don't really feel qualified to review this book. I'm not even sure I got it. This book felt so dark through most of it, as if she could never chase away her demons. I almost want to talk to her now, and see if she has found any peace. Despite all this, I found myself in tears at the end, and not necessarily sad ones. It's not a clear cut happy ending, but I did find some comfort.

The writing is very stylized. Although I find the subject matter difficult to read, the world themselves were beautiful. It's easy to see the poet coming through. While this isn't going to be a fun read necessarily, I do think it is worth reading. There is some satisfaction at seeing her work past her alcoholism and learning more about her son. So while it's not a breezy read, I did enjoy it.

Galley provided by publisher for review.

ILoveBooks says

The first thing that will strike the reader is the honesty and openness of the author, a rare find in books. The reader will be thrown into a chaotic world where the main character is not in control of her life, constantly rolling with the punches (metaphorically speaking). The reader will barely have time to process one event when another takes place. This author really knows how to allow a reader to probe inside her mind.

Following the main character's life from horrible to bad to semi-better to good is a very interesting process, even more so because this is a true story. The main character will soon feel like a friend to her readers, some will want to shake her at times and hug her in others. The events described in the novel are painfully detailed to the point of where the reader feels the embarrassment or shame that the main character is feeling; this author can really evoke feeling in her readers. Any novel that contains a life lesson may be thought of as cliché, however, this novel completely sidesteps this typical quality. The plot is unique, as it is a true story; the characters are real and the main character really grows on the reader. This novel is terrific for young adults and adults who appreciate true-to-life stories and are willing to mull through hard events.

Kate says

A memoir about many things, the heart of it being about the double-loss of her baby she had as a teen. Double-loss: first, she adopts him out to family members; then, as an infant, he dies. The barely-buried trauma pierces her life for many years. I was drawn into the book's evocative style but about halfway through, the book became oddly utilitarian ("this happened...then this...then this..") in a way that disengaged me. However, there was a lot in the first half that lingers with me.

L. Ann says

If only poets wrote everything. This book took me so long to read for reasons personal and because the book has so many painful, beautiful, criss-crossing threads.
