

Spirography: A Memoir of Family, Loss, and Finding Home

Cara Stoddard

Wayne State University Press (Apr 8, 2025)

Softcover \$22.99 (264pp)

978-0-8143-5190-1

Immersed in an endemic sense of grief, Cara Stoddard's coming-of-age memoir *Spirography* is about cancer's enduring presence in her life.

At seven years old, Stoddard was diagnosed with a pediatric germ cell tumor. Thereafter, cancer became a fixture in the Stoddard home. Later, Stoddard's father dealt with cancer himself for six years before he passed away when she was twenty-three.

From waterskiing on Michigan's lakes with her father to missing out on the second grade to undergo chemotherapy treatment, the memoir teems with affecting anecdotes. These are interspersed with rich vignettes from Stoddard's adult life, marked by incisive interiority. The memoir's principal question is "Were our two cancers a coincidence?" Much of the book maps her and her father's lives to derive meaning from their shared hardships. In a section dedicated to an ad hoc visit to her father's manufacturing business two years after his death, Stoddard writes, "I began to think that to make a blueprint of a mold is to imagine something in all of its intricacies... . And maybe our soul doesn't really live 'inside' our bodies and only gets 'released' when we die but exists before we are even conceived. Its essence blueprinted into our parents, and their parents before them, in their memories and modus operandi." Here and elsewhere, deep metaphors are used to plumb meaning from loss.

The book takes the form of a redemption story while also expressing deep-seated anxiety related to Stoddard's experience with illness. Quiet explorations of Stoddard's budding sexual identity couple with ruminations on dealing with loss and survivor's guilt. In time, catharsis is sought via poignant optimism and newfound parenthood.

Spirography is an introspective memoir that recasts grief in terms of acceptance.

XENIA DUNFORD (March / April 2025)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.