

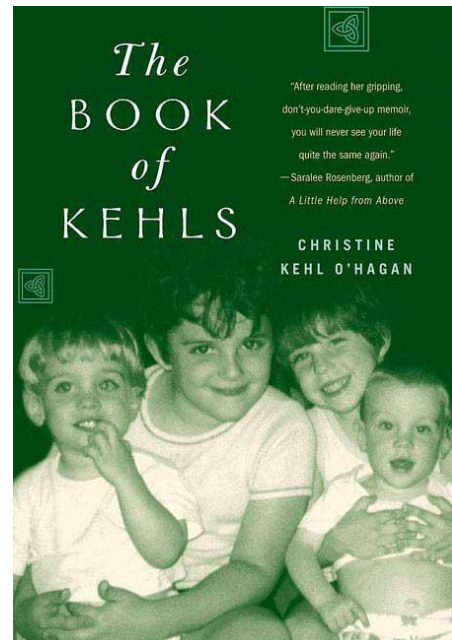
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Book of Kehls

By *Christine Kehl O'Hagan*

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Book of Kehls* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Book of Kehls*.

About the Book

When Bridget Moore left Ireland in 1865, she never suspected that along with her trunk and rosary beads, she was bringing Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy to New York City. It wasn't until Bridget was a grandmother, one who had buried four of her grandsons, that she realized she'd brought MD to the States, a disease that would haunt her family for generations. Years later, her great-grandchildren grew up under the elevated trains of Jackson Heights, Queens—and one of them was Christine Kehl O'Hagan, the author of this moving and insightful memoir.

Christine, her sister Pam, and their brother Richie played in the streets and attended mass every Sunday. But Richie had trouble walking. By the time he was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, Christine learned that two of her mother's brothers—uncles she'd never known about—had died of MD. Christine eventually married and had a healthy son. But one day she saw her second boy, Jamie, struggle to climb onto the school bus—and she knew then and there that this disease would be with her the rest of her life.

Extraordinarily written, with much honesty and humor, *The Book of Kehls* is the engaging story of a family that has known love, courage, and heartbreak in equal measure—and survived.



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About the Author

Christine Kehl O'Hagan is also the author of the novel *Benediction at the Savoia*. She was born and grew up in Jackson Heights, Queens, and now lives with her husband on Long Island.

Discussion Questions

1. This book is a true story of one family's struggle with a fatal disease—and a carefully crafted narrative. What are some of the techniques that O'Hagan used to create characters that involve us deeply in her story?
2. Why did O'Hagan choose to present her son Jamie's death scene in the prologue? Do you agree with the decision to begin the memoir on such an intense note?
3. Though this memoir is sad, it is also funny. What impact does humor have on your experience of the book?
4. During much of the book, O'Hagan grapples with her desire for "a life that matters." Discuss whether her desire was fulfilled.
5. In several emotionally charged passages, the author describes the grief that she and her husband experienced right after their son's death. Will this memoir be helpful for parents who suffer the ultimate loss?
6. O'Hagan doesn't credit her Catholic faith or any one source of strength as the "magic bullet" that carried her through. Instead, she writes about following "sparks." What does this say about her religious upbringing? What do you find helpful when confronting life's hardships?
7. The author writes about muscular dystrophy's "gifts." Discuss the idea that difficult circumstances can offer gifts.
8. Though begun on a sad note, the book ends optimistically with the author at the playground with her three-year-old granddaughter. O'Hagan writes that "joy is attached to our hearts with the most tenacious of threads." Discuss whether this statement resonates with your own life experiences.

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