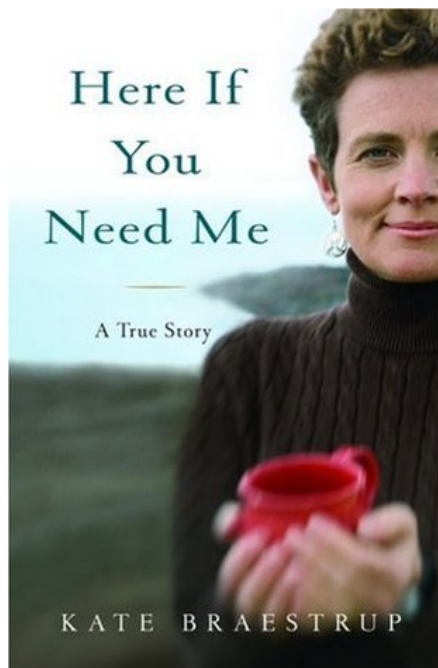




Here If You Need Me

Kate Braestrup

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When the oldest of Kate Braestrup's four children was ten years old, her husband, a Maine state trooper, was killed in a car accident. Stunned and grieving, she decided to pursue her husband's dream of becoming a Unitarian minister, and eventually began working with the Maine Game Warden Service, which conducts the state's search and rescue operations when people go missing in the wilderness.

Whether she is with parents whose 6-year-old daughter has wandered into the woods, or wardens as they search for a snowmobile rider gone under ice, or a man whose sister left an infant seat and a suicide note in her car by the side of the road, Braestrup provides solace, comfort, and spiritual guidance when it's needed most. And she comes to discover that giving comfort is both a high calling and a precious gift.

In her account of her own life and the events of her unusual job, sometimes joyful, sometimes heartbreaking, Braestrup is warm, unsentimental ("No one is immune to the Plucky Widow story!" she acknowledges), and generous. *Here If You Need Me* is a funny, frank, and deeply moving story of faith and hope.

Here If You Need Me Details

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Cory says

This book is exquisite. I've veered away from organized religion in the past five years or so, and ordinarily the story of a woman becoming a chaplain and the work that she does would give me the heebie-jeebies. However, Braestrup's stories of finding divinity and love and peace and salvation in the mundane, and the unique way she has of looking at the work of the Maine Game Wardens is fascinating and moving. If I had access to a chaplain like Kate Braestrup, I'd probably be more religious. Also, those who follow my reading exploits know that I'm new to the whole audiobook thing, and this is the first book where I found the listening to be a boon, and not just a format change. Read by Braestrup herself, you really get a sense of the tenderness that she brings to all the things she does. And her gorgeous use of the language is "amplified" when read aloud.

SueAnn says

I'd read a few good reviews for "Here If You Need Me," by Kate Braestrup, but was a little put-off by the "quasi-religious" theme. Very quasi, as it turns out. She's a Chaplain for the Maine Warden Service (the Maine equivalent of a cross between a Parks Ranger and a Game Warden). She's married and has six kids and has a very funny attitude about religion, what she describes as "the God thing."

Anyway, finally broke down and bought it late yesterday afternoon and within the first two chapters (it's a very short book), had cried three times and laughed out loud about eleven times. When she first got her uniform, her best friend told her she looked like a cross between an effeminate priest and a gas station attendant.

Anyway – check it out.

Catherine says

This book is quietly and unassumingly beautiful.

In terms of Big Picture, it's a book about divinity and theology - it's about the author's conviction that where the divine shows itself is in ordinary expressions of love between people; in the casserole the neighbors bring over after a death in the family; in the community that searches for a lost resident; in the guy who scratches behind a lamb's ears and makes it bleat with happiness (real guy, real lamb, all in Maine - it's not an allegory).

But lest that sound preachy or off-putting, it's worth saying that this is all embedded within story after story of the Maine Park Ranger service, and their work in Maine's wilder areas, finding the lost and the suicidal and the disturbed, treating the living and the dead with respect, protecting wildlife and snagging the guy who's drunkenly taking too many fish from the river. It's wound about Braestrup's own life story, her efforts to get through seminary after her husband dies, the hilarious trials and tribulations of raising four children who are all - in the book's beginning - under the age of fourteen. It's a meditation on grief and grace, laughter and hardship, death and life. It's beautifully *quiet* - I felt as if the whole world hushed while I read it.

Braestrup is a Unitarian Universalist, so her perspective on God and on life is very reassuringly *not* fundamentalist, or even particularly Christian. Her idea of God is in the hands that pull a child from the ice, or the middle-of-the-night dedication of the rangers as they pour out of their homes and through the state to begin a search for a missing soul in the middle of winter.

And this is the moment that made the whole book for me:

My children asked me, "Why did Dad die?"

I told them, "It was an accident. There are small accidents, like knocking over your milk at the dinner table. And there are large accidents, like the one your Dad was in. No one meant it to happen. It just happened. And his body was too badly damaged in the accident for his soul to stay in it any more, and so he died.

God does not spill milk. God did not bash the truck into your father's car. Nowhere in scripture does it say, 'God is car accident,' or 'God is death.' God is justice and kindness, mercy, and always - always - love. So if you want to know where God is in this or in anything, look for love.

Look for love - sounds so simple, but when you think about it, isn't that a pretty transformative way of looking at the world?

Lauren says

What a powerful book. This has been on my to-read list for over a year, so I tore through it in one plane flight and have been mentally chewing on it ever since. Braestrup's life provides ample drama to move the narrative forward (I won't spoil the story other than to say that it starts with the death of her husband, and follows her unique decision to move on with her life as a minister to search-and-rescue workers), but it's her humble meditations on spirituality that are the most memorable parts of the book. She tackles some of life's biggest questions for those of us with any religious inklings: does God have "a plan" for us, and if so, how do you reconcile a plan that involves devastating loss? What if everything that happens to us is random, and God is truly, only found in our reactions to these challenges? I found it to be a quick but memorable read - I highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in investigating their own views on spirituality and love.

Michelle says

Kate Braesrup is a Unitarian Universalist minister for the Maine Warden Service whose husband, a state trooper, was killed in a car accident. The skeleton of this book is her journey from her husband's accident to minister through caring for the bereaved and caretakers of those lost or injured. However, the meat of the book are her interpretations of spirituality, religion and her practice of it. She does this with a light touch and with humor and I left the book feeling centered, grounded and reminded.

Afton says

I thought this book was pretty full of nothing. On the one hand, anyone is free to write a book, I just wish there was a more selective way to know what books are going to have meat. I listened to the unabridged audio version so I heard how she wanted to tell the story, which in this case, I think made it worse because there isn't much room for imagination.

Here are my two takes:

The Bad: She's a minister but seems to be a contradicting one. She says she doesn't believe in heaven, that you just die, that's it--yet she tells people that their loved ones have passed on to heaven. So is she deliberately trying to be dishonest or is she just unsure of what she really believes? Probably the latter.

I thought her beliefs uninspiring and depressing including Christ just sort of being a prophet. I was irritated that she sounded like Christians had a negative connotation and didn't seem to like the idea of her son becoming one hypothetically. I didn't like how she and her children would casually swear occasionally and how she purposely put in the night when her kid was watching a Bruce Willis action movie (probably R) in the background while she studied about Jesus with her other daughter. I think she was trying to show that she wasn't an uptight minister, a cool mom, a casual spiritual leader. She sounded humble in words, but things like these made it seem like she was a bit proud of her unorthodox and lax ways.

The good: Anyone who dedicates their lives to service really are to be commended. It might be too picky to try to say her beliefs aren't consistent with each other when I should be glad that she's just chosen to do something good for herself and hopefully for others.

I thought it was sweet that she did this on behalf of her husband's dreams. I'm impressed when any kind of single parent manages to take on both roles of mom and dad and keep the family together and seemingly happy.

Jan says

I hate reading books that are a waste of time.

This is a true story of a woman who becomes a Warden Minister (someone they call to comfort the family when a relative is lost in the woods), because her husband, who is killed in a traffic accident, was going to become one.

She wasn't religious at all (her husband was somewhat), and she explained this to all of her professors as she studied religion. IF she is called out and finds out the family is atheist, she is able to put them at ease, because she doesn't have anything to force onto them.

The book is about nothing. And she doesn't even tell that many experiences of being there if anyone needs her.

Walter says

This book is sneaky: at first, I thought that it started slow - though with a compellingly tragic story whose point was unclear - but something about it touched me and I kept reading. I can now say that I am incredibly thankful for having done so, as this book is one of the most simple, honest, engaging and thought-provoking that I have read in some time.

Kate Braestrup does not claim to be an expert - in fact, it's in the sharing of her flawed humanity that she is so compelling - but she is so clearly committed to living her truth and takes us on that journey with her. It's an incredible, often heartrending journey but ultimately one of significant meaning and significance. The vignettes that she shares will inspire at times as well as forwarn. They are stories of triumph and tragedy, all the while illuminated by the author's honest and observant prose. One thing's for sure with this book: you really do feel like you know exactly what's going on with the Reverend as she makes her rounds in both her personal and professional lives ... and are the richer for it. Interspersed in others' stories are observations about life and love, scriptural references at once appropriate to the particular story as well as universal in nature and heartwarming descriptions of the events and people whose lives point to the finer possibilities in our own.

Are there a few quirks that the reader will have to adjust to? Sure. Are these meaningfully detrimental to the book? Not at all. The honesty and insight are so profound that the few challenges are only noteworthy in a review like this one (as they would not likely mentioned in, say, a conversation with a friend to whom you were recommending the book).

In summary, then, I recommend this book highly and have to admit that my initial skepticism was misplaced. It is an honest, compelling joy to read and reflect upon. Its impact will linger long after it has returned to my bookshelf, as will its gifts of insight and inspiration....

C says

Danica recommended this to me during a couple of our random conversations. I like Park Ranger (or, in this case, game warden) stories, I'm lost in ambiguity about my spirituality, and I'm a bit of a nature nerd.

But really, I think we were discussing loss the second time the book came up. I finally put it on hold.

By the book description you might think this is going to be an emotionally difficult read. It does have some heart wrenching moments, of course, but this is not the overall tone of the book. Those moments are balanced with gentle humor and some downright "involuntarily snort while reading" funny moments.

I really enjoyed it. She has a level-headed, affable voice in her writing and balances difficult emotions with humor. Her kids' nicknames alone cinched it for me.

I finished it wanting to recommend it to others and give the book as a gift to a couple folks. I don't think I could really pay a higher compliment than that.

heidi says

My mom is a pastor, not a chaplain (they are related, but not identical), and I see her do a lot of this work, the work of sitting with someone and not knowing the answers. It's hard. There are no good answers.

This was a really hard book to read. Bad things happen to lots of nice people, especially children. As someone who had to give up on some shows (Cold Case and SVU, I'm looking at you) because now that I have kids, they are just too scary. and as you might expect, sometimes little kids die in the woods. Not always -- there are stories in here where no one dies, or is hurt. There are little bits of her life (I am amazed at her ability to be a single parent AND be on-call.)

Interestingly, the author's faith journey, while evident, is not explicated. She doesn't talk about how she came to believe, or even what she believes. The most significant story about faith was about her realization that she hadn't had a religious epiphany, that her scientific faith had not been taken from her by an involuntary mystical experience. I liked that. I appreciate stories where love and humanity are marks of the Divine. Her journey is not road-to-Emmaeus, although it is full of roads.

Read this if: you wish people of faith were more humble, if you want a non-Jodi-Picoult view of widowhood, if you've never thought about who fishes unlucky snowmobilers out of the water

Do not read: without a sufficient supply of kleenex, if your faith is threatened by a chaplain who doesn't believe in an afterlife, if you can't handle people dying

Margaret says

I loved this book. It is a true story written by a widow who decides to become a Unitarian minister and work as a chaplain for Maine's game warden service. She writes about grief, love, commitment and hope as it intertwines with search and rescue missions, death notifications and simple ceremonial invocations. I am touched by her view on faith which is surely tested in her work in which evil and bad luck are frequent visitors. When a dead child's body is pulled from an icy lake, we all ask, Where is God in this? Her response....look for the love. The love of the game warden who rescued the child, the love of the community who supported the grief stricken mother. This book is a gentle meditation on many topics I hold dear. Good job Kate Braestrup!

Deirdre Keating says

ETA: Have since read several times, and still love it passionately. Great book. I personally want to make the HBO series of it:)

You can subtract at least one star just knowing this was probably a case of "right book at the right time" for me. Also I haven't really read it yet---I was listening to it on CD.

I wondered if it would be engaging enough to keep me awake for my solo roadtrip to Flagstaff. I liked the first hour or so on the way there, but LOVED it on the long drive home, especially after taking the wrong turn onto 191 and ended up deep into Navajo Country with no road signs anywhere, especially after the guy I

stopped to ask directions from tried to get in my car...

So now I want to actually read it. The past few weeks have dealt with so many of the big questions Braestrup's work and life deal with...evil, loss, pain. I love how she finds the philosophical puzzle much less engaging than the practical, "What do we do now?" I love her definition of what makes a miracle a miracle (one's gratitude), and I love the exchanges between her children and her.

I would describe the book overall as a love letter to the men and women of the Maine game wardens with whom she works, and to her late husband. I had no real idea of the work they do, and am in awe of it now.

I can imagine the film version, because her work supplies the drama and suspense, and her humor and perspective give them meaning.

Elizabeth says

Not only is this woman a wonderful writer, but she's a Unitarian Universalist minister. And she has a sense of humor, which is important if you're the chaplain to the Maine Warden Service. There's a lot of standing around in cold and hot, swatting mosquitos, watching people and nature. Her definition of who God is to her (pp. 54-55) is something I'll go back to again and again (not a white guy with a beard). Try it...

Chelsea says

I don't know quite what to say about this book other than: GOOD. I was trying to explain this to a coworker, and they gave me the "sure, right, uh-huh" look. It hits one of my fiction kinks, what with all the heroic actions undertaken by real people who care about the people they're trying to help. But it's better, because it's real.

Within the first thirty pages or so, I had cried at least twice, but had laughed out loud considerably more. She comes across as incredibly genuine; the loss of her husband and her determination to continue with her life was present but was not forced on me. She didn't force a strong narrative, either, which I appreciate in a memoir; there are very few periods in someone's life that can be told mostly sequentially and create a complete story with a defined ending. Her story doesn't have an ending yet, so she doesn't really give it one. Wonderful.

She's a quasi-local author, and I'm sure we'll be having her in for a signing at some point. She stopped into the store about a week after the book came out, and checked the bestseller list. She was so excited to see that she had hit number three!

Kati says

This book was just fabulous. It was fabulous. I went and heard the author talk earlier this winter and enjoyed myself a bit, but felt a little skeptical about the quality of such a "local" book. But everyone kept telling me how good it was. So I checked it out from the library, read it and was amazed. Prepare to cry in almost every

chapter. I love what she has to say about God and I love what she has to say about the doing of very hard work without becoming hard and cynical. It actually made me stop and think twice about cops... so there.
