



The Book of Why

Nicholas Montemarano

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"This is a haunting and extraordinary book." -- Julie Orringer, author of *The Invisible Bridge*

Self-help writer Eric Newborn's motivational books have spawned a legion of devoted followers who swear that his ideas have pulled their lives from the brink. But after Eric can't save his own wife from dying, he finds himself at a loss -- the power of positive thinking is simply not enough to overcome his grief. Retreating to the home he and his wife shared on Martha's Vineyard, Eric, with his dog as his closest companion, attempts to distance himself from the teachings he has come to hate.

But when a woman named Sam shows up at his door one night five years later, Eric must finally confront his heartache and reconcile his worldview with the pain he has suffered.

At once a powerful love story, a stirring portrait of a soul laid bare by grief, and a celebration of coincidence, connection, and the belief that true love never dies, *The Book of Why* explores the deep powers of the heart and mind to shape the world around us, blurring the lines between loss and love, fate and free will, despair and joy.

The Book of Why Details

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Author : Nicholas Montemarano

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From Reader Review The Book of Why for online ebook

Patti says

I read The Book of Why by Nicholas Montemarano as an advance review given to me by NetGalley. It's my favorite book thus far sampled ahead of publication date because I cannot stop thinking about it.

Our protagonist Eric Newborn used to be a rather trite and smug self-help author who thought he had all the answers, until he had to face the tragedy of losing his wife. He finds that his facile advice doesn't even scratch the surface of a grief like his, and he is forced to reexamine his life. Bits of his advice are scattered throughout the book, and over time we see just how little Eric Newborn really knows. He's a very human protagonist. Don't we all flounder in this life, not really knowing how to deal with the hard cold reality of death?

There are no real "answers" in this book, which is why I loved it so much. We the reader are forced to look at our own realities and come up with our own versions of the truth. I generally hate self-help books because of their one size fits all approach to life. So it was highly satisfying to read a book where I saw the truth of my own journey reflected. I couldn't answer Eric's questions, but I could put my own under new focus. I loved that. Four and a half stars.

Maxine says

Eric Newborn is a best-selling self-help author and motivational speaker. He tells his (mostly) adoring audience that they can do anything, have anything, cure any illness with the power of their mind. They just have to believe they can to make it so. But then his wife and the love of his life becomes ill with cancer and, suddenly, he is faced with her mortality and his own grief and nothing, not his mind, his books, his faith, offers him any hope or salvation.

Here, I will admit I am not a fan of self-help books. At their best, they just seem like magical thinking, at their worst, they seem cruel - if there are no accidents and the mind can heal any illness, what does that say for the millions of people who die from accidents or disease? Are they weak minded, did they not try hard enough? If it is their own fault, do their survivors have the right to grieve openly? And what about infants and young children who are the victims of illness or accidents - who's to blame for their deaths - their parents for not providing a safe mind bubble around them?

Some of these questions are asked in this book. When they are raised in his seminars, Eric has had no answers. However, he has promised one woman, the mother of a sick child, he will write a book to explain away these seeming objections to his philosophy, The Book of Why. He has never been able to do so and after his wife dies, he stops writing altogether and goes into hiding. Eventually, he does start the book but only for himself and in it, he raises the inevitable and ridiculous ends his philosophy could lend itself to - ideas like stopping rain on your wedding day with the power of positive thinking, why we don't live to be two hundred if we really want to.

When I first had the opportunity to read this book, I almost turned it down. As I said, I don't like self-help books admittedly for very personal and emotional reasons. However, I was curious to see how author Montemarano would deal with this subject in fiction. Would he turn it into the kind of 'you-can-make-

lemonade' answers that so many self-help writers make of their own tragedies or would Eric's grief and his conclusions reflect that of most of us - a personal, deep, and angry response to a chaotic and unfair fate?

That I really liked the book should tell you the answer I took away from it. Interestingly, one of the parts I liked best was his list of self-help books about grief and all the different and contradictory answers they give. I say interestingly because, after reading a few other reviews, this seems the part of the book most others objected to.

The Book of Why is an easy read (I read it in a couple of hours) but it is not an easy subject. For such a depressing subject, it is surprisingly hopeful and uplifting without being melodramatic or devolving into simple platitudes. At times, the book felt like a group of interlocking short stories, some of which never reach any real solution. However, these stories seemed to mirror the stages of grief and, so, they ring true. Montemarano acknowledges that self-help books do help thousands of people while pointing out that the realities of death and grief are complex and as varied as the people who face them and there are no clear-cut simple answers. This is a difficult subject both in fiction and real life and I don't know anyone who has an objective opinion on it. In The Book of Why it is handled in a kind and compassionate way while making for an engrossing read and I recommend it highly.

Etienne says

The title catch my attention! That why I choose this book at first without really knowing what is was about. It's more or less a fiction book, with pieces of self-help/magic thinking throw here and there in the story, the protagonist itself is a self-help writer so... There are some good part, mostly some reflexion about life and positive thinking, which is a good thing, better be positive, but always be careful to not become blinded by magical thinking, but it mostly an average life drama story with a writing slightly below average. Kind of a self-help book with a story. It seem I can make a comprehensible point of view here so I should stop, I hope you get the point of that book. Not a bad one, but not really a good one either. I would have like deeper reflexion and maybe something a bit more special about the story.

Anna says

2013 has just begun, but I'm pretty sure this will end up on my top 5. I've read six books so far that release this year and it beats most of them, so it's definitely top 5 right now. I'll keep you updated. This is a beautiful story of love and faith and miracles. It absolutely made me question the way I look at the world. If you enjoyed books like The Land of Decoration or The Age of Miracles, serious think-y books with good plots, this one is for you.

Amanda says

A truly exquisite, heartbreakingly hopeful novel. Highly recommended.

Nicole says

Honest, lovely moments between a husband and a wife, a female German Shepherd named Ralph and a heartbreaking story line make this novel a real beauty.

Kat (idangerous) says

Copy provided by NetGallery.com in exchange for a review

Dissapointment...I'm sorry but to me this was. I didn't get what the hype was about. I'm not into self-help books.

Eric Newborn has turned around millions of lives with his bestselling self-help books. That is until he loses his wife to cancer and he abruptly stops believing in his own advice. Eric disavows his past teachings and lives as a recluse in Martha's Vineyard. But when a determined fan tracks him down, he is forced to relive his past memories and contemplate his next book, *The Book of Why*.

Nicholas Montemarano's novel, *The Book of Why*, actually begins as a self-help book.

Unfortunately, *The Book of Why* fails to advance beyond that point. The primary story arch simply ends in the second half of the book amid colliding memories and never gets picked back up. What began as the documentation of a man's journey – either towards redemption or destruction – simply ends up going no place. In all honesty, there is no discernible plotline to this story. While the premise held real promise, the book devolves into scattered thoughts and ideas with no real connection and no destination.

The Book of Why may have some emotion and artistic depth, but it fails to deliver on its early promise of a story. What we get instead feels unfinished and unedited.

JudithAnn says

The book starts off with Eric Newborn living a reclusive life on Martha's Vineyard. One day, a woman comes by who wants directions to what turns out to be his own house, as she can't find it. He claims he doesn't know the street name but through circumstances, they spend some time together, and she helps him getting back into the real world.

There is a lot of looking back to Eric's recent past, a few years ago, when his wife was still alive. Eric was a self-help guru with several books in his name, claiming if you believed something strong enough, it would happen.

He has many followers but there are also people who doubt him: how can he claim that people with an incurable illness will be fine if only they believe they will be? When his own wife falls ill, he loses the belief in his own ideas.

Sometimes there are some paragraphs with lists: things people wrote to him in the past, advice he finds in books on how to deal with grief, etc. ("Some books say be modest. Some books say don't be too modest. Some books say volunteer. Some books say take charge, stand straight, smile. Some books say take the

stairs, not the elevator." etc.). This is actually good fun.

What I also liked was the presence of Ralph, a female dog. She had been Eric's wife's dog and one of the few left-overs from his life with her. I also liked Sam, the woman that comes to visit. She is more spiritual than Eric, and believes her dead brother gives her useful information in her sleep. She convinces Eric to come with her and follow up on these ideas, leading to amazing coincidences that must be more than just coincidences. This helps Eric to come to terms with the death of his wife. For me, the coincidences were unlikely, but acceptable as a part of the story.

This was a good story about loss and love, friendship and fate.

Chad Sayban says

Eric Newborn has turned around millions of lives with his bestselling self-help books. That is until he loses his wife to cancer and he abruptly stops believing in his own advice. Eric disavows his past teachings and lives as a recluse in Martha's Vineyard. But when a determined fan tracks him down, he is forced to relive his past memories and contemplate his next book, *The Book of Why*.

Nicholas Montemarano's novel, *The Book of Why*, actually begins as a self-help book. In fact, I had to double-check that the early review copy I had received was the correct book. It turns out that Montemarano interweaves Eric Newborn's first person narration between quotes from his fictional books, speeches he gave and conversations from his past. Early on, this works effectively to paint the backstory of the optimistic Eric in contrast to the raw pessimism of his older self. It is the destruction of an idealist who thought he had the power to control the world around him with his beliefs, only to find out that the most important thing in his life could not be saved.

Unfortunately, *The Book of Why* fails to advance beyond that point. The primary story arch simply ends in the second half of the book amid colliding memories and never gets picked back up. What began as the documentation of a man's journey – either towards redemption or destruction – simply ends up going nowhere. In all honesty, there is no discernible plotline to this story. While the premise held real promise, the book devolves into scattered thoughts and ideas with no real connection and no destination.

The Book of Why may have some emotion and artistic depth, but it fails to deliver on its early promise of a story. What we get instead feels unfinished and unedited. At times Montemarano demonstrated beautiful writing, but it is sadly not a readable work of fiction and did not take me anywhere.

Laura says

Eric Newborn is a disillusioned self-help writer and widower living alone with his female German Shepherd named Ralph. "I didn't know, when I thought I knew it all, that I would join the chorus of askers," he says at one point in the book. Sam Leslie who comes looking for him is one of those askers. Her arrival and their subsequent adventure is the catalyst for Eric to finally tackle writing the book that he has promised the lady in the yellow dress he would write ages ago, *The Book of Why*.

Interspersed in the book are sections of his previous self help texts and talks. He spoke strongly about the law of attraction among other things: what you put out into the universe is what you get back. And this is one of the things that the other askers puzzle over so hard. Why is it that someone who does good and puts out good or is innocent as is a young baby can still have something bad happen to them? (Don't read it looking for a definitive answer to Why.)

Also throughout the book there are pieces of his life from when he is young through his marriage with Cary that help to explain first his belief system and then the disillusionment with it.

The book is beautifully written. It will linger on your mind afterwards. I give it 4 out of 5 stars.

Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book in exchange for my unbiased opinion.

Lori L (She Treads Softly) says

In *The Book of Why* by Nicholas Montemarano protagonist Eric Newborn is a best selling author of self-help books. The only problem is that he no longer believes in the answers he presupposed to others - that positive thinking will prevent bad things from occurring in your life. He knows that despite his previous claims, he doesn't have an answer to why bad things happen to good people. Eric has escaped his life and fame by hiding out on Martha's Vineyard with his dog, Ralph, when Sam, a woman who is searching for him, ends up at his door, injured. Eric tries to keep his identity a secret as long as possible, but she eventually discovers who he is.

Interspersed at the beginning of sections in *The Book of Why* are excerpts of Eric's lectures and/or his books, so you can get a feeling for his philosophy of "positive thinking can cure everything" He believes that if people just believe they can create their own reality. The narrative actually follows several different timelines, jumping from present day to Eric's childhood to the time he spent with his wife. His childhood sections help to reveal the birth of his philosophy. The sections with his wife show his beliefs tested and challenged. The sections in the present reveal his current disillusionment.

I was conflicted on this novel. If I didn't commit to reviewing it, I might have stopped at 50 pages, however, at about half way through the novel it began to mesh together for me and at that point I was engrossed in Eric's story. I found myself less annoyed with Eric's naive beliefs and his casting aspersions on other beliefs or blaming people for their suffering. Then, at the end of the novel, I was back to not enjoying the novel as much, but in this case it was due to a choice Montemarano made in his writing, rather than the plot, that was off-putting for me.

Montemarano is a very good writer. *The Book of Why* is beautifully written, with almost poetic-dream like passages, but it is also a very dark, depressing novel. There are many questions raised but few answers given. Certainly if you have ever wondered if there really are coincidences, if everything happens for a reason, and if miracles happen, you will want to discover what Eric concludes... and you might be disappointed in the ending.

Eric tells us: "I didn't know, then, that it would be my final book. Before this one, I mean. Though I don't consider this a book as much as a letter: to the woman in the yellow dress, to Cary, to Gloria Foster. I didn't know, then, that I would ever need to write another book; that I would write *The Book of Why*, after all, though not as an answer but rather as an unanswerable question. I didn't know, when I thought I knew it all,

that I would join the chorus of askers. (Location 1727-1730)"

Highly Recommended - but read it with a positive frame of mind

Disclosure: My Kindle edition was courtesy of Little, Brown & Company and Netgalley for review purposes.
<http://shetreadssoftly.blogspot.com/>

Charley says

An interesting take on a relatively unexplored idea. Why is it that it usually seems like self-help authors have a tough time... well... helping themselves? Eric Newborn is a award-winning, best-selling, whatever superlative you can think of, self-help author. But regardless of all those who lavish praise on him, or testify to how his works have changed his life, there's always a few people in the audience who have questions he just can't answer. And when these questions start reflecting his own personal difficulties, he begins to doubt his own self-help ability.

"The Book Of Why" is written in such a way that we're to believe that it exists in the universe of the novel. Eric is writing the book you're reading to a character in the book. He won't name who "The Book Of Why" is for, just that they'll know it's about them. It's an interesting conceit that gives a nice bit of leeway to the form of the novel. There are bits that are meant to be transcripts from Eric's seminars, bits that are more conventional narrative, and bits that are directly speaking to the reader (which, again, is meant to reflect the book's status within the book's own universe).

Overall, an interesting read from this author and enough that I'll be looking for some more of his work (I believe he's been published in the "Best American Short Stories" series, and since I have most of those for the past couple decades, I'll probably find some more there)

Sharon says

A beautiful book - a love story, a grief story, cynicism and hope together, along with mysterious happenings that never fully make sense (like life). Reveals the strengths and the weaknesses of law-of-attraction philosophy. Recommended for anyone who has lost someone, and anyone who wonders if it's safe to love.

Dina Said says

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Marija says

The Book of Why covers a tricky subject regarding death. The tone of the novel is meant to be hopeful—describing a man’s struggles as he attempts to come terms with his wife’s death. However, I don’t feel that the author entirely succeeds in achieving this tone. There are various moments in the novel—situations that trigger memories and ideas that are introduced but left incomplete—which are rather shocking, not just for what is stated, but for the implications of what is said.

In the beginning of the novel and at the end, Montemarano plays and hints at certain ideas surrounding a character to whom his narrator dedicates this novel: a future twenty-seven year old Gloria Foster. The author plays it safe by not formally stating the narrator's future intentions and hopes regarding Gloria; it's up to the reader to determine what might happen next. Yet, the implication surrounding these future hopes can be read in both a positive and negative light. As a reader, I don't think that this is a subject that should have been left open-ended, especially given the fact that the Gloria Foster who physically appears in the novel is only a young child. I honestly don't believe Montemarano intended for such a reading to be made, but it is a subject that could be misconstrued by a reader.

The ambiguities surrounding this particular subject, paired with the strange situations that trigger the narrator's memories—e.g. his compulsive fascination with lav-related bodily functions and how the act of watching his dog relieve itself conjures up a cherished memory of his dead wife—leave the reader feeling shocked, confined and at times, utterly bewildered. Likewise as a reader, I felt trapped by the narrator's voice, as if I was in a tunnel listening to the narration bouncing off the walls. This feeling of confinement is

only emphasized by the narrator's use of repetition, both of words and phrases, which is especially prevalent at the end of the book. The reading experience was truly oppressive, and I can't say that I've ever really come across narration like this to such an extent before.

The thoughts expressed in this novel are meant to be positive, a kind of personal learning experience for how one begins to cope with loss and loneliness. But as a twenty-seven year old myself, if I happened to be the twenty-seven year old to whom the narrator dedicates this book, I can't honestly say that my feelings for the narrator would be entirely sympathetic in nature, solely based upon what was written. On the whole, *The Book of Why* is a novel that seemingly fails to achieve its positive intentions. It is a novel that turns a tricky subject about death into something lurid through implication.
