

Stranger Care



Sarah Sentilles

ISBN 9781922330956
MEMOIR, PAPERBACK

www.textpublishing.com.au/book-clubs



PRAISE FOR *STRANGER CARE*

'A powerful, heartbreaking, necessary masterpiece.'

CHERYL STRAYED

'Sublime in its craft and its heart.'

SARAH KRASNOSTEIN

'This is a book for everyone because it goes to the heart of the human condition. It is a book about love.'

PETER MARES

'Be warned: your heart will be altered by *Stranger Care*.'

KATE MILDENHALL

ABOUT SARAH SENTILLES

Sarah Sentilles is the author of *Draw Your Weapons*, *Breaking Up with God*, *A Church of Her Own* and *Taught by America*. A graduate of Yale University and Harvard Divinity School, she lives in Idaho's Wood River Valley.

DEAR READER,

When my friends learned that our foster daughter might be reunified with her biological mother, they brought us books. They left them on our front porch. Stacked them in our living room. *Goodnight Moon*, *Violet's House*, *Where the Wild Things Are*.

My friends built a library of children's books for the daughter we might not be allowed to keep. If she couldn't have us as her forever parents, then she could have stories that would light her way.

I wrote *Stranger Care: A Memoir of Loving What Isn't Ours* as a love letter to our foster daughter. It's also about what the world might look like if we took better care of one another, if we were willing to live as if everything—book, tree, star, rock, child—were kin.

What counts as family? What makes a mother? What does it mean to belong?

I once heard writer and anthropologist Laurel Braitman argue that sperm whales are the most intelligent animals. Whale sonar, she said, can transmit emotions that are then shared by other whales. The shared feelings give rise to a communal self. 'Whales...might not say "I",' Braitman said. 'They might always be a "we".'

When a hundred whales strand themselves on the shore and die, scientists study their bodies and learn that only one or two of the hundred whales were sick. 'We sick,' Braitman said.

We happy. We lost. We hurt. We heal. We grieve. We love.

The whale's intelligence requires not just thinking about the feelings of others but *feeling* the feelings of others. And isn't that exactly what books make possible?

I don't know what will happen next for our foster daughter, but part of what will let my heart be ready to face whatever comes will be the powerful, beautiful, 'we'-generating books I've read in my life—and the conversations I've had in community with other readers, like you.

Thank you for all you do to support writers and readers.

With gratitude,

Sarah Sentilles

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After reading *Stranger Care*, how would you define motherhood?
2. Sentilles weaves in examples of mothering through nature and animals. What are some examples

that stuck with you? What do they illustrate about parenting and how we are interconnected?

3. Discuss Sentilles' journey through the foster-care system. What did the system get right? Where did it go wrong?
4. Sentilles experiences an array of emotions about Coco's birth mother. How do her feelings shift over time? How would you feel if you were in Sentilles' situation?
5. What do you think Sarah means when she says to Coco, 'You were never ours, yet we belong to each other?'
6. Sarah writes about her frustration with the common question 'Do you have kids?' What might be a better question?
7. *Stranger Care* is a love letter to Coco and the countless children in similar positions. Discuss some things you learned while reading the book.
8. Do you know anyone who is or has been a foster parent or a foster child? What do they think the foster-care system needs so children and families are protected and can flourish?
9. How can we, as a society, be better at caring for and protecting one another?
10. How do we ensure a more life-giving future for this planet?
11. How has *Stranger Care* changed your thoughts about the foster-care system? If you were in Sentilles' shoes, do you think you'd be able to continue to be a foster parent?