



# We Are All Shipwrecks: A Memoir

*Kelly Grey Carlisle*

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**We Are All Shipwrecks: A Memoir** Kelly Grey Carlisle

**FOR FANS OF THE GLASS CASTLE, now a major motion picture starring Brie Larson, Woody Harrelson, and Naomi Watts**

"Moving and complex, this is an exquisitely written tale of perseverance and unconditional love. A worthwhile addition to any collection."—*Library Journal*, STARRED Review

**A mother's murder. Her daughter's redemption. And the complicated past that belongs to them both.**

Kelly always knew her family was different. She knew that most children didn't live with their grandparents and that their grandparents didn't own porn stores. Her classmates didn't sleep on a boat in the L.A. harbor, and she knew their next-door neighbors probably weren't drug addicts and johns. She knew that most of her classmates knew more about their moms than their cause of death. What Kelly didn't know was if she would become part of the dysfunction that surrounded her. Would she end up selling adult videos and sinking into the depths of harbor life, or would she escape to live her own story somewhere else?

As an adult, Kelly decides to discover how the place where she came from defined the person she ultimately became. To do this, she goes back to the beginning—to a mother she never knew, a thirty-year-old cold case, and two of Los Angeles's most notorious murderers.

*We Are All Shipwrecks* is Kelly's story of redemption from tragedy, told with a tenderness toward her family that makes it as much about preserving the strings that anchor her as it is about breaking free.

## We Are All Shipwrecks: A Memoir Details

Date : Published September 5th 2017 by Sourcebooks

ISBN :

Author : Kelly Grey Carlisle

Format : Kindle Edition 324 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography, Crime, True Crime

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# From Reader Review We Are All Shipwrecks: A Memoir for online ebook

## Scottkane2010 says

A wonderful memoir and an engaging read. What I love about Shipwrecks is Kelly Carlisle shows sympathy to the flawed family members who helped to raise her. She isn't bitter about the circumstances of her upbringing, but in fact appreciates the small blessings she had along the way. Highly recommended

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## Vanessa says

I found this such a fascinating read. This is written with such attention to detail you could almost forget this is a personal memoir and not a well written piece of literature. I really enjoyed this unique and interesting summary of a life. I found this so captivating I was sad the book had to end.

Although there are quite a few sad moments littered throughout, I was also deeply heartened by this book. There's a lot of reflection and you sense that Kelly only wants to share her story for no other reason than to make some sense of her life and to honour those that helped her get to where she is now. Throughout her childhood and adult years Kelly tries to find clues to uncover what happened to her mother who was murdered under mysterious circumstances when she was only a newborn baby. It is a journey of self discovery, self awareness and questioning where you belong in the world. This is a very personal account and gives a raw insight to her very interesting life, full of whacky characters and weird situations that you can't help but enjoy it for the funny stories it brings to the page. I love the sentiments of this book so much and it made my heart warm, with her ability to embrace the love around her amongst all the chaos and dysfunction. It also tells me loud and clear there is no such thing as a "normal" family.

Thanks to Sourcebooks and Netgalley for my advanced readers copy.

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## GoldGato says

Her mother needed money and must have decided the best way was to turn a trick on the streets of Los Angeles. She had a newborn girl, just three weeks old. So she placed the baby inside a motel drawer and walked outside. She probably never thought she would become one of the earliest victims of the notorious Hillside Stranglers. Author Kelly Grey Carlisle was that newborn and she uses this memoir to detail her search for herself and some kind of normalcy in a world that didn't give her a great start.

*How I was a little baby who needed a home, and my grandfather did not want me, and my grandmother did not want me.*

The author eventually went to live with her grandmother and her partner. Then granny had a fatal stroke and it was back to the West Coast to live with her grandfather. An Englishman who spoke of great deeds, he had turned his back on his homeland and spent his days running a porn store in the Valley. He really wanted to live on a boat and that's where Kelly Carlisle spent her childhood, in a dilapidated Long Beach marina, where pollution and trash co-existed with pets and their urine and tapeworms. She called her step-

grandmother, "Mommy", and watched as the woman gradually became a secret alcoholic obsessed with religion.

*Maybe home is what you carry inside you, the way a place makes itself part of you, for good or for ill.*

They weren't poor and she was sent to a private French school then on to a good high school. All the time she worried that she would lose her ramshackle family, just as she had lost her mother. Different from others, she learned to adapt to what others wanted until she decided she had to live her own life and find her own path.

Maybe we're all just Mormon Rocks and tumbleweed.

I wasn't sure I would enjoy this read. Then Carlisle's wonderful writing drew me in, chapters of life-affirming reflections and the realization that her eccentric childhood gave her a distinctive viewpoint. I sometimes wanted to shake her and her family into some common sense, but then I'd turn the page and another lovely passage awaited. We are who we are and god bless the child who's got her own.

Book Season = Summer (ears of trees)

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## **Courtney says**

It was really cool that I got to meet Kelly Carlisle before I read her book. I was at the Decatur Book Festival and saw a panel called Nature vs. Nurture that I was interested in. I got there, saw the blurb on the book, and bought it before I even went to the panel! And, as it turns out, the other author on the panel had to cancel so it ended up just being an interview with Kelly. She was eloquent and honest, and her writing is the same. Because I had seen her in person and heard her speak about her life, I knew for a fact that what I was reading was a memoir, but she is such a vivid writer that I still had to keep reminding myself that it wasn't fiction. I enjoyed reading Kelly's voice and seeing the people in her life through her eyes. The book is not as funny as I initially thought it would be due to the blurb, but that didn't diminish the story. My only complaint is that the end (when she begins to search for information on her mother and father in earnest) seems sadder than the rest of the book, despite the fact that Kelly suggests that she is happier with her husband and daughter than she has ever been in her life. I think it is because I shared her grief in finding out information that was devastating, about accepting that she would never definitely know what happened to her mother, that she would never meet her father, and in discovering the lies that people in her life had told her. But this is a memoir and it would be silly to think it should have a "happy ending" because it is real life! In any case, the book was engaging and fascinating and I really enjoyed it. Highly recommended.

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## **Lolly K Dandeneau says**

via my blog: <https://bookstalkerblog.wordpress.com/>

"Who killed her? No one really knew. My grandfather had explained this to me. How had she been killed? I knew that too. She'd been strangled. Why she'd been killed didn't seem as important, and who could answer that question anyway? Why did people die? They just did. People died all the time. Other questions seemed

excessive, nosy- like the people that slowed down to stare at crashes on the 405.”

This memoir is not just simply about the tragic murder of Kelly’s mother Michele Ann Grey, when Kelly was a baby, left behind in a drawer. It is the background noise of a complicated, unique upbringing. Today, it’s not that unusual to encounter children being raised by their grandparents, but decades ago it wasn’t so much the norm. When her grandmother passes away, Kelly ends up under the roof of her grandfather Richard and his much younger wife Marilyn. “Sir Richard, that is.” Much of the survival funded through a porn store the couple owns, that mustn’t ever be mentioned to others, Kelly was surrounded by content she wasn’t ready for. If early exposure to sexual images aren’t enough to confuse a young girl, moving into a houseboat surrounded by misfits, prostitutes and drug addicts certainly is. With a grandfather that loves his ‘Little Toad’, there is more hidden about her family history than she feels free to uncover. Told for years her mother died in a car crash, she discovers that just isn’t so. Who was her father? Nobody worth mentioning, if you ask her grandfather, just some jailhouse trash, if he even was her father. Her grandfather was a character, some people just are, but those who live with them aren’t always delighted and charmed- sometimes swallowed up in shadow instead.

Her family history is scattered to the winds, half truths- half lies. Why does her grandpa have few pictures of her mother? Why is he so bitter and hateful about her deceased grandmother, Spence? The things he tells are brutal to little ears, from sexual stories and jokes to hateful comments. Bitter with disgust for his ex-wife and her ‘friend’, trying to stain the fond memories she has of both, Kelly is thrown into confusion about love. Seesawing between giving her the best, such as making sure she attends top schools, to exposing her to the worst. Forcing his way of life on his wife and child, his nature wasn’t one to ask for approval before making life changing decisions for everyone. Some call it willfulness, others controlling. Did Spence’s secrets drive her mother to her brutal ending? Could her life choices really have caused her mother Michele to run, or was it Richard’s absence? Is Richard to blame for the way her mother turned out? Just where can Kelly point her finger? Just who did murder her mother, could she have been an early victim of the Hillside Stranglers? Or was she a victim of terrible parents?

Her family is abnormal compared to fellow students. Where they have calm adoring homes, beautiful clothes, popular perky friends, Kelly is stuck feeling frumpy, alien to the youth she should understand. She doesn’t listen to the right music, she is a throwback more invested in old shows and movies than in what’s the hot current trends. Other girls don’t have to care for elderly fathers, nor carry the dark mystery of death deep in their hungry hearts. They are sheltered from the filthy things men do to women, at least for now. They don’t yet have to navigate the world full of deviant acts.

Growing up with missing pieces makes for much struggle. As her grandfather ages, he becomes less the adoring, fun-loving grandpa he once was. Marilyn is the only mother Kelly has ever known, and the pain of watching the once beautiful younger woman become a worn out, faded shadow of her former self because of her grandpa’s demanding, often cruel nature is a difficult reality to stomach. Through the years, becoming more of a caretaker for her grandfather she finds solace in swimming, but must fight the jealousy he feels when anything takes attention away from his needs. Much of Kelly’s existence is wrought with conflicting emotions. Sir Richard is the only father she has known, and he has done the best he could. There was love, there are fond memories that peek out much like the sun in a storm.

Will she make it out of this seedy place, living along the water with unfortunate people, on a boat that is falling into disrepair? Could she rise above the bleak existence her mother knew in her final years? Will she ever know the truth about anything in her life? How can she become a strong woman with her grandfather and Marilyn as the sole examples of love? Can she see beauty with a grandfather that immediately colors the world ugly, suspect of every situation, always thinking with his mind in a gutter? Will she sail off into the

unknown and finally find a life for herself? Will the thickness of blood keep her moored where she doesn't want to be?

This memoir is a painful peeling of many layers. None of us are 'normal', we all carry the weight of unmentionable tragedies. Kelly's just happens float inside a fog of mystery. A heart-breaking, sometimes funny, fascinating memoir.

Publication Date: September 5, 2017

Sourcebooks

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### **Andrea Johnson says**

This is a well-written memoir, and although I'm generally not a big fan of memoirs, this one was interesting. Read it for book club, and am bummed I cannot be there for the discussion!

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### **Kayo says**

Superb book.

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### **Abby Miracle says**

Picture a little girl who is mystified and endlessly curious about the sea, the earth, the night sky and every creature she encounters. Picture this same little girl gleaning comfort and companionship from these same elements as she makes her way through an unconventional childhood and reckons with the fraught history of where she comes from. This memoir is a poignant reminder of the power of the natural world and the importance of our connectedness to it.

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### **Yancey says**

Full disclosure: I went to college with the author. But that aside, this is a fantastic memoir. The story of a girl who realizes that most families have their own level of imperfection... although hers was more imperfect than most.

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### **Grace says**

I really enjoyed this memoir. Carlisle was raised primarily by her grandfather and his wife, who she considered to be her parents, after her mother was murdered when she was 3 weeks old. Nevertheless, she

had a lot of loving adults in her life, and her grandfather was certainly an interesting person, at least I thought so for the first couple sections, because he's this snobby acting Englishman who has the title of "sir" and shops at a fancy grocery store and yearns to own a yacht but also owns a seedy porn store. I also learned there is (or was) such a thing as a "traveling porn video salesman", which I'm guessing doesn't really exist anymore, which is kind of a shame. anyway, as Kelly gets older, you can see more glimmers of something not quite right about her grandfather, definitely some things that kinda really creeped me out but that the author writes of in a very matter of fact way that did make me think perhaps she didn't want to or isn't quite ready to reckon with some of her grandfather's big failings.

Carlisle writes so descriptively of the places she lived and the people she lived among, and while her family was definitely eccentric and a little broken in many different ways, what comes through is the love she received and gave to the people around her who became her family.

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### **Scottsdale Public Library says**

What an amazing memoir! Carlisle immediately hooks you with a tender but honest recounting of her voyage from an awkward child to a confident adult and all the quirky, loving and exasperating people who played vital roles in her growth. Added to this is the shadow of a mother she never knew, who was brutally murdered by an unknown person, and whose loss the young Kelly increasingly experiences as she grows up and becomes a mother herself. Wonderful writing and a compelling life story make this book a must-read!

- Louisa A.

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### **John Mendiola says**

First off, I never talked to Dr. Carlisle during my time at Trinity but she always seemed like a great professor from a far. I picked up this book from a recommendation from my friend, Maddie Smith. I really enjoyed this book. It was profound and meaningful in a way that felt very personal and grounded. There were so many events in her life that could have been this melodramatic climax but, ultimately, the book plays out very much like all of our lives. There are dips and highs and fleeting experiences and lasting memories and lots of unsatisfying conclusions. Our lives just happen. There's no guarantee for closure or even happiness but we have to do our best to live with ourselves, each in our own way. My favorite part of the book is definitely the lack of black-and-white characters. Even the short-lived appearances of the people at the Marina had assumptions and then revelations in every one of them. People and opinions are something we always have and know yet they should and do change when we take the time to understand them better. As someone who grew up with challenging family life, this helped me cope, in some small ways, to the realities of my situation and the people around my life. We're all, to some degree, all victims and products of our past though, deep down, there is a genuine love driving most of us. Anyway, this was a wonderful book that I'd happily recommend.

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### **Raidene says**

4.5 stars A powerful memoir of a young woman who came to terms with her sometimes tragic, often

unconventional childhood, one filled with many challenges but also love. The author's acceptance of her past, her generosity of spirit and development into a positive person automatically create sympathy and admiration towards her in the reader(at least this reader)!

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### **Shirley Cagle says**

Although I should feel sorry for Kelly, given the early loss of her mother and her unorthodox childhood, but she seems to have remained well-grounded. The memoir reveals some details that are wince-worthy and even shocking, but she narrates them in such a matter-of-fact manner that one can almost believe it seemed normal at the time.

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### **Kim McGee says**

This memoir is about a little girl who was raised first by her grandmother and then by her grandfather and his very young wife. This sounds innocent enough except the family business were successful adult video shops which then meant Kelly had everything she needed including being sent to a French immersion school in Los Angeles. Kelly was fortunate in that to balance her grandfather's crude remarks and rough behavior, she had a friend in his wife Marilyn. As Kelly grew up her mother's unsolved murder when she was just a baby took on more meaning and she actively pushed to have the cold case reopened and solved. Her story is heartbreaking and honest and it makes us all cherish our family and childhood innocence. My thanks to the publisher for the advance copy.

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