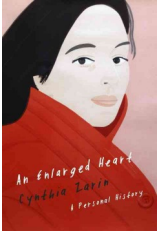


An Enlarged Heart: a personal history

An Enlarged Heart



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Summer--a great time for reading novels--is also a good time to catch up on more episodic reading. This memoir is perfect for a short period listening to the cicada orchestra from the porch swing, or a quick read before bed.

In twelve varied segments, poet and former *New Yorker/Talk of the Town* writer Zarin shares important milestones in her life as well as a passion for several material objects that she has become attached to over the years.

The strongest and most emotionally-charged piece is the title one in which Zarin describes a typical day on the Cape with her and her husband's assorted brood of kids, when the youngest gets ill. It began with a cough. Her brother had a cough. And, after all, what was a cough?? By this time, Zarin had treated countless upset tummies and sore throats. But two emergency visits later, she found herself kneeling next to her daughter while the ambulance raced to Children's Hospital in Boston.

The diagnosis: the rare Kawasaki Disease, which is the leading cause of heart damage in children. This segment shows how quickly our ordinary lives can turn frightening and possibly tragic.

A lovely autobiographical piece is "Two Pictures." Here Zarin describes visits to the Metropolitan Museum with her grandfather fifty years ago where they often shared a Saturday routine. In the quiet galleries of the museum, her grandfather took her to see his favorites and then later, he accompanied her to view her own: Picasso's *Guernica* and one called *Hide and Seek* by Pavel Tchelitchew. The second one depicted a tree filled with the faces of children, who were trapped inside--a nightmare tree. For both of these pictures, the young Zarin discovered a way of looking at the horror portrayed, scanning individual objects one at a time.

In "Coats" she catalogs some of her favorite coats in life, including an old musty winter jacket of her father's, and an exquisite pale blue one given to her on the spur of the moment by a great aunt. But her favorite pair of coats came from Italy where on a cold late afternoon, she found a very expensive, but must-have coat. She bought it. Her husband, who had been out walking at the same time, found another coat that he thought she would love, so though they could barely afford one, they purchased both. She describes what befell this magnificent coat collection later. Several of the essays really capture life in New York City, both now and in the last century, but my favorite geographically-centered ones are set on Cape Cod. Zarin describes this seaside with joy and love.

She's a gifted writer. If you like reading memoirs, you'll enjoy this book. In style, it reminds me of Gretel Ehrlich's writing but it is much more city-centered.

Posted by Dory L. on August 20, 2013

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