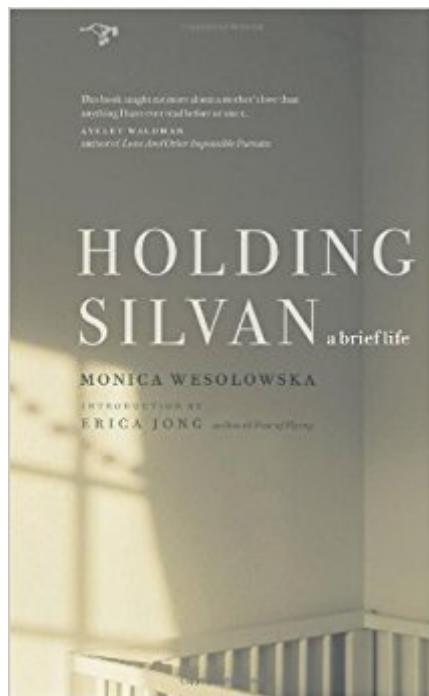


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# Holding Silvan: A Brief Life



## Synopsis

In the opening of *Holding Silvan: A Brief Life*, Monica Wesolowska gives birth to her first child, a healthy-seeming boy who is taken from her arms for observation when he won't stop crying. Within days, Monica and her husband have been given the grimdest of prognoses for Silvan, and they must make a choice about his life. The story that follows is not a story of typical maternal heroism. There is no medical miracle here. Instead, we find the strangest of hopes. Certain of her choice, Monica must still ask herself at every step if she is loving Silvan as well as a mother can. The result is a page-turning testimony to the power of love. By raising ethical questions about how a death can be good in the age of modern medicine, *Holding Silvan* becomes a joyous paean to what makes life itself good. Whether you have suffered profound loss or not, this book will change your life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book clearly deals with a dark, difficult, and important subject. I can't imagine anyone better equipped to do full justice to such a profound human experience." — Michael Cunningham, author of *By Nightfall* and *The Hours*"We have never needed this book more." — Erica Jong, author of *Fear of Flying*"I was swept away by this book. Heartfelt, heartbreakingly brave, it takes us on a fascinating ethical journey in prose that shines with Wesolowska's love for her son. I feel fortunate for the experience, as if I have held Silvan myself. I'll never forget it." — Julia Scheeres, author of *Jesus Land* and *A Thousand Lives*"A tender, poignant and courageous narrative — insightful and beautifully written." — Abraham Verghese,

author of *Cutting for Stone*"When I picked up this book for the first time, my heart sank. I wondered if I could even bear to read such a sad story. And yet, within moments, I couldn't put it down. I read long into the night, unable to leave the story until I reached its at once achingly tragic and profoundly life-affirming end. That the story of the death of a child is, in fact, life-affirming is a tribute to Monica Wesolowska's graceful prose, her unflinching eye, and most of all her indomitable spirit. This book taught me more about a mother's love than anything I have ever read before or since." <sup>151</sup> Ayelet Waldman, author of *Bad Mother: A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities, and Occasional Moments of Grace*"When someone writes about grief they also write about courage, since they survived to tell the story. The beauty and emotional integrity of *Holding Silvan* strikes me to the core. This book is brilliant." <sup>151</sup> Lidia Yuknavitch, author of *The Chronology of Water*

In the opening of *Holding Silvan*, Monica Wesolowska gives birth to her first child, a healthy-seeming boy who is taken from her arms for observation when he won't stop crying. Within days, Monica and her husband have been given the grimdest of prognoses for Silvan. They must make a choice about his life. The story that follows is not of typical maternal heroism. There is no medical miracle here. Instead, we find the strangest of hopes. In clear and unflinching prose, this startling memoir bears witness not only to a son's brief life but to the evolution of the writer herself <sup>150</sup>; from Catholic girl yearning after sainthood to maternal struggle to give her son the best she can. The result is a page-turning testimony to the power of love. By raising ethical questions about how a death can be good in the age of modern medicine, *Holding Silvan* becomes a paean to what makes life itself good. Whether you have faced great loss or not, this book will change your life.

I currently have at least four books I've begun to read but have set aside to continue reading at a later time. Yesterday I opened "*Holding Silvan, a brief life*" by Monica Wesolowska and could not put it down (except to sleep) until I read each and every word, finishing it today. The words so raw and honest reach deep within the soul and challenge us to step into the shoes of parents who are faced with the horrific news that their child will not live but to also have to decide how to best love that child and what that means. Monica does not hold back her deepest thoughts or shield the reader from the ugly truths of her journey and I applaud her for her bravery. This book, no doubt, has and will help other moms and dads understand they are not alone. Monica and David have done love in the most selfless way imaginable.

This powerful, well-wrought book is a must for anyone thinking about death and parenting in the modern age. Wesolowska shares with us, in beautiful prose, the story of her and her husband's decision to spend the few precious weeks of their firstborn son's life holding and loving him as opposed to forcing him to stay alive via intrusive, artificial means. It is a hard book to read, but well worth the effort. Wesolowska doesn't sugarcoat the experience of disappointment, rage, and loss that is necessarily part of such an experience. We follow her story with baited breath, as she must have, hoping against hope that Silvan will somehow survive in spite of it all. He does not. And we experience her pain as a parent, struggling to reconcile her joy-filled expectations with the heartbreaking reality of her son's brief life. The ultimate message, however, is one of hope: Silvan - even in his short time among us - lives a full life. A strange and unexpectedly complete life. Yet the book is not merely an intimate narrative of Silvan's life. Wesolowska does not stop there (although she could have). Interwoven with this bittersweet tale, is a compelling meditation on American culture and the American medical establishment, both of which too often value quantity over quality. The fact that Wesolowska is able to move us not only emotionally, but also intellectually, is a tribute to her skill as an author and her love as a mother. This book should be required reading for all medical professionals.

I picked this book up at a friend's house and read the first 20 pages then asked if I could borrow it. Then her husband (who is NOT usually a reader) decided he had to read it so I ended up ordering it anyway. I read the rest of it in one sitting while telling my husband, children, and dog to please just leave me alone. I never would have thought such a subject matter could draw me in, but it is a real page-turner. Weslowska writes the day by day chronology of all the difficult ethical and emotional decisions she and her husband had to make after having a baby whose brain was damaged during delivery. It is a detailed account of what this kind of traumatic event actually feels like and it is incredibly revealing of where we are as a society in regards to medical technology and the ethics of living and dying. This book is very important right now; medical technology has come so far and we find ourselves facing end-of-life decisions no one is prepared to make. It is also beautifully written, elegant and clear prose that rings with authenticity and grace. Weslowska doesn't back away from any of the prickly issues at hand. I highly recommend this book; it is a must-read for anyone who is facing a difficult decision about a loved one's quality of life, also practitioners especially in hospice situations or people who work with children who have life-threatening illnesses.

I came across the author's article in the New York Times about her memoir. I immediately downloaded the book on my kindle and began reading that night. I couldn't put it down. Three months earlier my husband and I made the heartbreakng decision to terminate a much wanted pregnancy. A pregnancy that we battled infertility and multiple IVF cycles to conceive. I resonated with this book on so many levels. The author's writing is incredible. She made a heart wrenching decision out of love for her son. I was so extremely comforted by reading this. We kept our decision private for fear of judgment by others, and it was so comforting to read their story. Anyone who has lost someone close to them will find a connection to this book. I cannot recommend it enough. Their strength is a true inspiration.

Holding Silvan is a heart-wrenching story of an impossibly difficult situation and a mother's fierce and undying love. Monica Wesolowska is a gifted writer and astonishingly brave. This is a deeply moving and even hopeful book. If you feel like you "can't" read this book due to the difficult subject matter, I strongly encourage you to buck up and give it a try. I predict that--like me--you won't be able to stop reading. And further, that you'll never regret getting to know Silvan through the extraordinary prose of his loving mother.

When I read this book it took my breath away. I didn't want to read this book as I too lost a child at an early age. I didn't want to be reminded of the grief I felt. Then a friend told me how powerful and well written the book is and I reconsidered. I'm glad that I did. I couldn't put it down. She HAD to tell this story and it is so deeply felt it was as though I was walking with her through every step of her decisions and conversations with her husband [ who by the way is a wonderful man]. Her description of the personalities of her family and friends and the medical staff left me feeling that if I saw them on the street I would recognize them.

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