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I Was #87: A Deaf Woman's Ordeal Of Misdiagnosis, Institutionalization, And Abuse



Synopsis

"I was six years old, alone and terrified, and no one knew that I was deaf". So began Anne Bolander's five-year ordeal at an institution for retarded and unwanted children. Emotions were not allowed at the institution, where children were beaten bloody for laughing, crying, or even touching another child. Children lived a robotic existence, and like robots, were known by numbers instead of names. Anne was #87. She endured five years of this abuse before being removed and placed in St. Mary's of Providence Center, where teachers correctly assessed her as deaf, not retarded. After only one year, Anne returned home and there survived many more years of abuse. Her story calls for vigilance today and everyday.

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Customer Reviews

This book should be on every high school reading list. With all the news about bullying this book really can put life into perspective for the reader. Anne must be a remarkable person to rise above so much. As you read the descriptions you need to remind yourself that this is not a story, this is an account of a life that was not created for reading pleasure, not fiction but real. Anne shows the reader how everything we know and do relates to our individual experiences from the past. I did feel differently after reading the book, not a sense of pity but rather one of awe. I hope you read this book for the opportunity to view an ordeal as an opening for better understanding of yourself and others.

The book was great. I recently became friends with Anne. I think she is an amazing woman. There isn't anything she can't do. I am proud to have her as a new friend. Just wish we lived closer.

Heart-wrenching read from cover to exit.

For someone with handicapped children, this will give them a real wake up of what some so-called caregivers do for gain from people who have good intentions.

This is an excellent recounting of the events of a life, but it is largely unemotional. The horrors of the primary school are not fully documented, leaving the reader with the impression that it must not have been all THAT bad - it was horrific, of course, but we don't see enough examples to really feel sympathy. Additionally, we never learn many personal things about the author, such as how she feels about her deafness (although this probably results from her stunted emotional growth) and why she felt compelled to write the book. It is a good book, however, and if it were not so difficult to track down I would recommend it to anyone interested in the subject matter. But because of the controversy surrounding its first printing, "I Was #87" is expensive and hard to find. Upon finally obtaining it, some readers may feel as I did - that the effort was greater than the book warranted.

There is no book like this and I heard that this book is no longer selling on shelves. I think it should be back on shelves. It involves a lot of history on pathological view from the doctors and hospitals which led to mistreatment and misdiagnosis on a perfect deaf child. What hits me the most is that my grandfather grew up not far from her and their age isn't much different. I am fortunately to have my life especially because of my great-grandparents' choice on placing my grandfather in right place and education. **MUST READ!**

Anne Bolander suffered from congenital hearing loss which her paternal grandmother attributed to prenatal exposure to a certain medication. Anne and her twin brother, Peter, born in 1954 become part of a large family. Sadly, their mother dies in 1957 and Anne has trouble navigating in the hearing world. Unable to remain in preschool because of her hyperactive behavior and inability to hear directions, her father, stepmother and paternal grandparents are ill-equipped to meet her needs. Misdiagnosed as retarded in October 1959 at Johns Hopkins, Anne then serves a five-year sentence at the Stoutamyre School. The "school" sounds like a medieval torture chamber; the children are not educated in academics nor taught self-care. Margie Stoutamyre, the school's

director made, in the words of Anne's co-author, Adair N. Renning, Nurse Wretched Ratched of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" infamy look like Mary Poppins. Dickensian workhouses pale in comparison to this place. Children were beaten by Margie at the drop of a hat; if one so much as looked at someone else being beaten, they, too received a beating. Belts, whips and a board with holes were used; children could only use the bathroom three times a day and even then Margie allotted them a certain amount of time which she monitored with a stopwatch. Illnesses did not exempt one from beatings. In one memorable passage, Anne was forced to eat another child's vomit simply because she saw him vomit at the table. In addition to the beatings, children were locked in the root cellar for days; kept in a windowless seclusion room and even strapped to a chair. Anne Bolander literally survived in hell. Mealtimes were rigid affairs where one had to eat in a certain way and keep a straight spine at all times. Failure to do so resulted in beatings. Anne describes how some children were literally beaten to death and she even recounts how she saw a boy being pounded to death simply because he had diarrhea. Her grandmother was the only person who was kind to her. In 1964 she takes Anne out of Stoutamyre for a few days to enjoy the World's Fair. By 1965 Anne's father and stepmother have her discharged. Anne, in her words has exchanged one Margie for another. Pat, her stepmother treated her in the same brutal and erratic fashion that Margie did. The only girl in a houseful of brothers, Anne concluded that being male was the way to survive and that "love" meant "being beaten" because she had been told by Pat how much Margie "loved" her. The one bright spot in her life during that period was the 1965-1966 school year she spent at St. Mary's. Kind, loving nuns nurtured her and helped heal much of the harm that had been inflicted upon her. Sadly, she is forced to leave the place because her father has been transferred to another state. Anne's secondary and adult years are marked by social unawareness. She is easily misled by those who are not well meaning and this pattern of gullible trusting follows her into the workplace. She thinks the nickname "Retard" is an honor because she wanted a nickname "like the other kids," not realizing the stigma attached. She steals gifts so as to gain popularity and is willing to do anything to have people like her. While understandable, the results are no less devastating. Anne graduates from high school in 1974 at the age of 20. She spends a summer in a hospital training program at a college in N.Y., but finds that the adjustment was more than she was then able to make. Anne exceeds her father's low expectations of her by not only graduating, but buying her own car and paying for the insurance herself after taking driving lessons. She spends the next number of years living in her own mobile home and with friends, some of whom use her. Luckily, Anne meets angels, such as Ruth and Glenn, who help her navigate tricky social terrain. Ruth encourages her to fix herself up; Glenn tells her what certain obscenities mean

so she will no longer fall prey to the rude and mean spirited jokes her co-workers play. In time, Anne learns these things. Setbacks occur, such as when Anne is raped by her father in 1979. She spends December of 1980 in a hospital, sorting out the problems in her life, starting with Stoutamyre. By the time she is released in early 1981, Anne is ready to put her life together. She moves out of one bad household where she was being monetarily exploited; becomes active in the deaf community and reconnects with her youngest brother. In March of 1984, her father remarries and Anne has by then realized that with the exception of her youngest brother, she has to cut her losses where her family is concerned. The final blow was when her father and stepmother argued over her brother's surgery when her father said he was not going to spend any money on his son as he was no longer a child. A hard, intense and much needed book, Anne is the voice of inspiration. She has survived in hell and, like the phoenix risen up out of the ashes. This book makes me think of the passage from Scripture and related song, "On Eagles' Wings."

I picked this book up at a library book sale several years ago, because I feel strongly about child abuse and vocalization about it. Once I started reading this book, I practically could not put it down. I was completely pulled in by the descriptions to the point where I felt I was right alongside Anne through her childhood to young adult, understanding her plight. The descriptions are remarkable. Some made me sick to my stomach. I cried in horror at how cruel and cold some 'humans' can be. I also cried in relief and happiness at the few kind people she encountered along the way. Keep in mind, this is a true story - as told as best as possible through a scarred woman, with the help of Adair Renning, who helped Anne put the book together. Despite having so much wrong done to her, including the original diagnosis that she was mentally retarded (she was actually deaf), Anne still continues onward and still had some faith left in people. She meets many bad people along her journey, but some good souls, too. I hope this book inspires more people to have tolerance toward those who are handicapped, and to be the 'good souls' they encounter in their difficult journeys.

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