

Literary Landscape

Book Review: True story of woman's abuse is open, honest

Posted Friday, April 26, 2019 1:45 pm



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"The Shattered Oak: Overcoming Domestic Abuse and a Misdiagnosis of Mental Illness"

By Sherry Genga

Publisher: Safe Goods Publishing

Pages: 116

By Colin Harrington

"The Shattered Oak: Overcoming Domestic Abuse and a Misdiagnosis of Mental Illness," by Sherry Genga and published by Safe Goods Publishing in Sheffield, is based on a true story. It is a story of open and honest reflections of personal experience with domestic abuse, the profound realities of recovery and a startling, and ultimately triumphant, resolution.

The story ends well through the interventions of a therapist, a very sharp nurse and the National Institute of Health (NIH). Or, as the story's hero describes it, "a little slice of heaven carved out just for me." This is a story of straight-forward disclosure in the first-person narrative that informs, inspires and provides one person's path through the wilderness of family dysfunction, abusive hardships in the extreme and extraordinary insights.

Narrator Barbara's "whole life changed" when she married the charming, intelligent and talented man named Innocent. Barbara could not have predicted how horrendously violent and abusive Innocent would become, in spite of how he provided so well for her and her three daughters and created a lovely, upscale home for them. Barbara is "drawn to putting (her) thoughts down on paper." Her journal entries are a solace and a method of keeping track of reality. With her husband's lies and her discovery of shocking secrets of his past life, Barbara recalls her past in order to fathom how she finds herself in a relationship with a man who brutally beats her regularly. The fact is, she remembers a childhood without love, extreme poverty and want, and with these revelations, a deeper understanding of herself. She is also well aware that her husband, too, suffered torment and abuse himself while growing up in an alcoholic family.

In spite of the kindness of a therapist and a courageous divorce in which she attains freedom from abuse for herself and her daughters, Barbara cannot shake a profound depression that leads to three suicide attempts. Deeply religious and spiritual, Barbara prays for enlightenment, or at the very least, a release from mental torment. But when she is committed to a mental hospital, she experiences a jolting loss of personal freedom and brutal treatment. It seems that she has gone from a life of torment to a life of torment in a new kind of hell. But through the attentive and kind professionalism of a nurse named Nancy, who notices markings on her body that seem to indicate Barbara has an undiagnosed medical condition, just recently discussed in medical journals, Barbara is released on medical advice to an NIH hospital in Bethesda, Md. It is at that point that her story mercifully changes for the better in her climb to effective treatments for Cushing's disease, pituitary cancer and a chance to recover her life.

Barbara's treatments at that time were part of a ground-breaking clinical study. The effects of high degrees of stress are just now being understood when it comes to trauma and abuse. New insights into Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and Cushing's disease are important medical aspects of domestic abuse situations. This book is a good resource for those in need of help and it tells of how one heroic soul faced down extremes of abuse and trauma with love and determination to recover her life.

In her post script, the author writes, "Some stories are meant to be a secret and some stories are meant to be forgotten. Some stories need to be heard to help the survivor live. There is help for women battling domestic violence, child abuse, suicide and Cushing's disease." There are links and resources for that kind of help at the end of the book.

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