



Ascending the Fourteener of Recovery: A Mother and Daughter's Climb toward Eating Disorder Freedom

KC Tillman

Bryn Tillman

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Ascending the Fourteener of Recovery is an accessible memoir about dealing with anorexia—with the help of unwavering family support.

Written with the help of her mother, Bryn Tillman's heartbreaking memoir *Ascending the Fourteener of Recovery* is about recovering from an eating disorder.

Tillman was diagnosed with anorexia when she was seventeen years old. Therapy programs and strict meal planning followed. After two years of this work, she was considered to be in recovery, but her struggles continued.

Made up of journal entries, poems, letters, and photographs, the chapters trade between Tillman's memories and those of her mother, KC. Each woman recalls moments of hardship and celebration following Tillman's diagnosis. The book uses the analogy of mountain climbing—in particular, with references to the fourteen-thousand-foot mountains in Colorado ("fourteeners")—in discussing the perseverance and strength that was required in Tillman's arduous pursuit of eating disorder recovery. Its discussions of anorexia are casual enough to make it accessible; they cover the emotions that the disorder prompted, including in relation to the Tillmans' mother-daughter relationship, in a sympathetic manner. Still, the repetitive nature of the disease takes its toll on the book's progression; as the same sentiments are returned to, the book becomes tedious.

Though its primary focus is on Tillman's experiences with anorexia, her mother's side of the story is resonant too. Her candid journal entries and recollections—including in moments of disbelief, anger, and depression—are vulnerable and affecting. Indeed, this mother-daughter connection becomes the book's driving force; its pages emphasize how their bond allowed them to defeat the disease together. The other members of the Tillman family, including Tillman's brother and her father, are such sparse presences, though, that questions arise about their particular experiences of her diagnosis and recovery.

Absent references to the science of anorexia, the book is digestible and personable. Still, its unedited excerpts of journal entries are often too casual in tone. Their raw, stream-of-consciousness style preserves their grammatical errors and syntactical issues: commas are misplaced, dashes are used in an inconsistent manner, and there are changes between the past and present tense (sometimes within a single paragraph) that are distracting. This lack of formality results in the sense that the book is more a lengthy blog post than a formal text for general audiences.

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ALLISON JANICKI (May 1, 2023)

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