ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

TRUE CRIME

Caged: One Woman's Journey from Cult Abuse to Freedom
Robert E. Hirsch
iUniverse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

In the vast field of what the world calls “organized religion” are psychological landmines encased in devout goodness and pious sweetness. On the surface this fertile terrain looks safe, but beneath the green grass lurks an array of explosive devices.

An isolated small town is the perfect place to start a commune (a.k.a. cult) in the name of God. Though countless stories of abuse and sometimes murderous escapades have been told, any brainwashed, lawless community amazes experts. One powerful, charismatic leader can implement madness, forging a psychopathic ministry based on the deranged logic of a sick mind. A single man’s mental illness becomes a dangerous contagion, inflicting insanity on once healthy, innocent participants. The cult’s indoctrinated children and adolescents are tragic victims of a sequestered society living by fanatical rules and bizarre interpretations of religious documents. Violence, rape, and molestation are often the result of twisted judgments.

Adapted by clinical psychologist Robert E. Hirsch, Caged is a dramatized account of a true story. Dr. Hirsch treated a traumatized young woman named Anne. She was abused from infancy until she testified against the crazed members of a so-called Christian refuge. Filled with vivid descriptions of sadistic bondage and sexual torture, Anne’s story is another documented case that belongs in a museum of religious mayhem. In scenarios that recall a medieval dungeon, the stanch elders (a.k.a. prison guards) engage in ritualistic punishment severe enough to make a seasoned horror novelist shudder.

As Anne heals under his psychotherapy, Hirsch forms an enduring friendship with this exceptionally resilient patient. The book's major flaw lies in its method of presentation, which is more a journalistic documentation of his professional experiences than a fictionalized adaptation. Anne's story is told in a series of re-enacted counseling sessions interspersed with courtroom scenes. His work remains fascinating, but at times it is tedious due to similarity in the structure of each chapter. Yet this does not detract from the importance of his contribution to cult studies.

With two decades of experience as a psychotherapist, Hirsch has provided psychiatric counselors, law enforcement personnel, and educational advisors with a behind-the-scenes look at what happens when a quiet, modest little town bonds under a weird creed governed by forces beyond a sane person's comprehension. Packed with essential details, this story contains revealing information that could be used to identify the establishment of dangerous sects and prevent their formation.

Julia Ann Charpentier