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Everything I Never Wanted to Be: A Memoir of Alcoholism and Addiction, Faith and Family, Hope and Humor

Dina Kucera
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Like a maelstrom, *Everything I Never Wanted to Be* pulls the reader into the powerful whirlpool which threatens to suck the lives of a family down the vortex of drug addiction and alcoholism. This is not a story of a caring family member or friend rescuing a loved one from drug abuse. Rather, this is a unique tale of an addict trying to save addicts: Kucera fights desperately to save her three teenage daughters from meth and heroin addiction while battling her own overpowering dependence on alcohol and painkillers. Naturally, the events that unfold are chaotic. This is the author's true story of a tumultuous but inspiring, against-all-odds journey to keep herself and her family afloat.

Stuck in a low-paying, thankless job as a grocery store clerk, Kucera is bent on making it as a stand-up comic. Any chance of assuming a normal life, however, seems out of reach. Her daughter, Carly, has gone in and out of drug treatment facilities—landing in intensive care more than once—since she was thirteen. The other daughters lapse in and out of recovery from alcoholism and heroin addiction. But the author never whines about her lot in life. She admits her life is what she made it.

It becomes clear that Kucera's amazing ability to laugh at life while in the throes of adversity is what, in fact, keeps her from sinking into utter despair. Her retort for childless people who try to advise her: "Having a dog or a cat or a yak is nothing like having a child. You will never have to pay for drug rehab for your yak."

Her humor is matched by her determination. At one point she has a major breakdown and checks herself into a psychiatric ward. But days later she is back home with a renewed sense of purpose: to save her children. Whatever her personal failures—lack of money, clothes, career—Kucera is determined not to fail her children. She has learned a bitter lesson: the drug addict that other people see in her child is not the same person she knows. A persistent and poignant longing for the people her children once were threads throughout the book.

Kucera has harsh words about the general lack of access to treatment centers, and she offers stern advice to those seeking help: "Fight, scream, cry, do whatever you have to do to get help for your children." She never gives up hope that her children will change. This read could be overwhelming were it not for the humor and hope running throughout the story. It is an intense and exhausting journey, but well worth the effort.
GARY KLINGA (October 18, 2010)

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