



Finding Myself

Kathy Kerwin

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This author's bravery and generosity in the sharing of her experiences with abuse and alcoholism are encouraging to those who have gone through similar struggles.

Finding Myself is a testament to ignoring the ego and focusing on unconditional friendship and service. Significant and often painful moments in Kathy Kerwin's life, including childhood abuse, alcoholism, and frequent career moves, illustrate her attempts to be true to herself and to serve others.

The book portrays Kathy as ambitious, caring, and brave. After two years of being coerced to perform sex acts with her manipulative older brother, nine-year-old Kathy dons leather shoes in anticipation of Andy's uninvited visit to her room. Once he arrives, she attempts to "kick him to death" until Andy's cries awaken their father. Andy never bothers Kathy again, and this experience teaches her to stand up for herself and others.

As an adult in the 1980s, Kathy battles alcoholism, sobers up, and becomes a certified alcoholism counselor. Devoted and hardworking, she soon finds herself steeped in the workings of a program for women with drug and alcohol addictions, which leads her to open Ann's Place, a transitional home for women. Kathy later owns several businesses with her longtime friend and housemate, Ellen.

The significance of the book rests in anecdotes about how women like Ellen rally around Kathy to celebrate, cry, or fight whenever needed, particularly after Kathy contracts Powassan disease (a neurological condition resulting from a virus transmitted by ticks) and has to learn to be independent again. Unfortunately, the included photographs of pets and friends are blurry, as is the book's structure. Scenes flash back and forth in time in a jerky motion that attempts to capture a life filled with meaningful relationships. For example, in one chapter, Kathy describes the agony of watching her mother die of cancer in 1974, while in a later chapter entitled "Drinking Problems - 1978+," she mentions visiting with her parents on the weekend.

Though the narrative lacks literary elements and at times reads like a list of events, Kathy's fearlessness and generosity in this frank look at the intense, scary, and loving moments of her life are impressive and encouraging. Kathy's notion that our egos are training us to believe that "if we had more money, more success or more whatever; then we would be happy" is a valuable lesson, as is her decision to deliberately keep her ego from dominating her life, instead leaning on her soul.

KAAVONIA HINTON (September 26, 2014)

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