

Healing Neen: One Woman's Path to Salvation from Trauma and Addiction

Tonier Cain

Health Communications (Sep 2, 2014)

Softcover \$15.95 (264pp)

978-0-7573-1796-5

Cain's tenacity and the completeness of her transformation show the depth of her faith, in this inspiring memoir.

In *Healing Neen*, Tonier Cain uses her life story to show the cycle of trauma and the path to healing through faith in Jesus.

In her life, and in this book, the nickname Neen represents a past self—not a person who has been destroyed or forgotten, but one who has been made whole, new, and free. At age thirty-seven, incarcerated for parole violation, pregnant with—and desperate to keep—her seventh child, she “came to fully know and accept the fact that there is a benevolent God who loves me.” This turning point came as she prayed on the floor of her cell, asking God to help her change. God responded, and she was eventually released to a trauma-informed recovery program that addressed the roots of mental illnesses and addiction: “Everything that happened to you as a child, you didn’t do to yourself.” This is where the change begun on the cell floor took root.

The book is primarily a memoir. But this is not just a memoir: Cain designs her story to resonate with and empower women who have been in similar cycles of abuse and trauma; she shows a path to healing that’s real and possible. Cain has much in common with these women: they are victims of abuse, of a deeply failing system; they are loving mothers whose self-destructive habits have caused them to lose custody of their children. Cain’s kinship with these women is powerful—she’s not a hero who swoops in condescendingly. As a result, the book is full of empathy and compassion. To those who don’t relate to her experience, Cain offers insight into broken systems and ways of life rather than telling a sob story: “I’m not asking for sympathy; I’m simply telling the truth.”

Cain is adept at using her story to influence. The writing is clear and direct, the tone honest and unashamed. Her narrative is organized chronologically, and the pace adapts well to key moments and summarizing longer spans of time. Occasionally the dialogue uses moderate, easy-to-read vernacular, such as “kin” for “can.” The use of scripture and spiritual phrases may feel cliché at first, but the tenacity of Cain’s actions and the completeness of her transformation show the depth of her faith—far beyond platitudes.

Cain’s is a relentlessly hopeful voice in very dark places.

MELISSA WUSKE (Winter 2015)

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