

How I Became Me

Danielle Clift

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How I Became Me tells the story of the Danielle Clift's tumultuous childhood and adolescence and her journey out of addiction into a happy adulthood. The memoir details Clift's rocky early years as she moves from house to house with her hard-working single mother, interacts with her alcoholic and abusive father, encounters drugs and alcohol with other rebellious youths, and becomes a runaway. Eventually, Clift joins the military in an attempt to gain control over her existence. She marries and begins a more stable life.

Although Clift's autobiography is cleanly formatted, the impact of her story is blurred by sloppy editing throughout. Unframed or incompletely framed quotations are frequent—the first line of the book is one of many examples. Even the properly framed quotations are presented awkwardly.

Frequent mistakes in capitalization and consistent errors in lettering add to the unprofessional feel of the story. Some examples of these include the failure to capitalize "Patsy," the incorrect spacing that creates "intot he" instead of "into the," and the phrase "WHAT ARE YOU GUY'S DOING" which includes a possessive rather than a plural form of "guy."

Clift's tale has a few moments that are well crafted. As she examines ants as a child and wonders about the insects' daddies, she transitions her readers easily into the information about her own absent father. Her love for her dog appears early and is a consistent thread throughout the book. Likewise, each character is well introduced, with personalities crafted through the characters' surroundings and their interactions with the author as a young person. For instance, through the cheap food, trashy entertainment, and friends present in her father's house, readers know that Clift's father is an undedicated worker and sloppy, as well as a poor father.

However, Clift fails to fully develop her characters. Her mother, for instance, is a pivotal character but the absence of dialogue prevents the reader from witnessing any real growth or change. The narrative also lacks cohesion. One traumatic event after another occurs without the incidents ever being tied together or used to offer insight into Clift's own emotional growth. Most notably, Clift does not share with readers the changes that must have occurred as she learned to trust and love the man she marries after the abuse and neglect of her early years. Eventually, Clift does rapidly chronicle her personal development and the improvements in her life at the end of the book.

Although a reader that has gone through experiences similar to Clift's may find some valuable guidance toward healing in this autobiography, the text is in need of substantial content and copy editing. The frequent errors and unorthodox style of the memoir substantially undermine the potential emotional impact of such a dramatic story.

EMILY ADAMS (November 28, 2012)

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