



Lilies in the Field

Kathy Anderson

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About life with schizoaffective disorder, the memoir Lilies in the Field is powerful in charting Kathy Anderson's path to self-worth.

Kathy Anderson's poignant memoir *Lilies in the Field* deals with her mental illness and the faith, courage, and perseverance that brought her to acceptance and peace.

From early childhood, Anderson dreamed of being in the Air Force and serving God. Her mother's Air Force career took the family to the Netherlands, where Anderson was born, and then to an idyllic life in Germany. The strict rules, striving for excellence, and acceptance of diversity that characterized military life provided the sense of belonging and security that she craved, and the small Catholic church on the German Air Force base nurtured her faith and satisfied her need for community and service.

But with her mother's retirement, Anderson's happy life in Europe came to an end. Relocation to the United States brought her face-to-face with a society awash in consumerism, pop culture, and a pervasive lack of respect for others. She learned how unfriendly kids could be to someone they saw as different.

The book details the obstacles that Anderson faced in completing her academic degrees. It also covers her time in the Air Force, which was marked by severe mental and physical stress and barriers to her aspirations. It analyzes obstacles well, laying responsibility for each where it belongs, with some going to the nature of her assignment to a missile combat crew with a toxic culture; some to her own inability to take sufficient, timely action on her own behalf; and some to a lack of adequate mentorship, together with feeling unheard and disbelieved with regard to her health issues.

The first symptoms of Anderson's schizoaffective disorder were sudden in their appearance. Anderson describes being plunged into a terrifying world ruled by delusions and paranoia and recounts being convinced that the government was out to get her. Broken in body and spirit, and with a long list of hospitalizations for schizoaffective disorder, suicidal ideation, and a suicide attempt, Anderson was discharged from the Air Force with medical retirement and benefits that allow her to get the help she needed, and also earn her doctorate.

Thoughtful in detailing Anderson's personal links between God and the military, the book features the hyperreligiosity of Anderson's delusional periods, depicting them as a "dark night of the soul." Photographs of Anderson and her family are included—a personal touch in this satisfying book about a woman finding her way back to God, and to a life marked by meaning and purpose.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (June 5, 2021)

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