

My Short Stories: Book One

Anne Shier

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Life's more dramatic events play out differently for different people. Canadian author Anne Shier's first work, *My Short Stories: Book One*, chronicles a number of such events. A high school computer science teacher and former English tutor, her book evolved from her interest in people, their challenges in life, and their interactions with one another.

This collection of stories chronicles a range of human experiences, from the tragic and the unusual to the mundane. Shier writes in first person, with occasional instances of third-person point of view. The first-person narrators are sometimes identified by names other than the author's, although their background appears to resemble her own, as reported in the author's biography. She attributes a number of stories to articles gleaned from the *Toronto Sun*, other print publications, and television shows. The accounts rarely exceed five pages in length, and topics include disastrous love affairs, imperfect marriages, sexual and gambling addictions, the pleasures of travel, imperfections in the criminal justice system, and boat safety.

In "Earth Angel," a sweet-tempered girl named Jillian decides to marry Curtis, despite his unpleasant disposition and inability to show love for her. Undaunted by his difficult personality, Jillian happily devotes her time to him and their two school-age daughters. When she is diagnosed with incurable brain cancer, Jillian accepts her fate with courage. The narrator concludes, "Her attitude had made a positive impact on everyone who knew her. I resolved not to take my own life for granted."

"The Girl We All Loved" is based on an episode from *Intervention*, an A&E television program. As a teenager, Janine resents having to babysit her younger brother and doesn't feel loved by her parents. In an attempt to make herself more perfect for them, she starts losing weight by eating and purging. Her best friend, unable to convince her to stop this dangerous practice, tells Janine's parents. Guided by a counselor, the parents help Janine recover.

The author has chosen compelling human interest stories to include in her book. However, her reliance on passive-voice narration tells rather than shows the unfolding events and characters. A paucity of dialogue and detail—both of which would have revealed more about setting and characters—may stop readers from identifying more closely with the stories. Errors in punctuation and grammar are an additional detraction from the overall work.

Despite these shortcomings, readers can gain understanding and empathy for others by reading about their struggles to cope with life's vagaries.

MARGARET CULLISON (March 27, 2012)

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