Clarion Review

True Crime

Sister Of Silence: A Memoir
Daleen Berry
Nellie Bly Books
978-0-615-38860-1
Five Stars (out of Five)

Writing *Sister of Silence* could not have been easy for award-winning investigative journalist Daleen Berry because in this case, she is the subject. Berry reveals her dark secret—a history of being sexually abused—with clarity and frankness in hopes of saving others from making her mistakes and encouraging them to find help.

When Berry was thirteen, she was raped by Eddie, a man in his early twenties, a friend of the family who encouraged her to come into his bedroom "to talk." Afterwards, she records, "I learned to keep a smile on my face, freezing all emotions inside so no one could see them." As a child whose alcoholic father was often absent and sometimes violent, Berry wanted love and attention, but she certainly wasn't psychologically prepared for sex. She felt worthless and guilty, and told no one. Eddie continually pressed her for sex against her will until at age sixteen, Berry became pregnant and, believing no one else would want her, married her abuser. By twenty-one she was caught in an abusive, dead-end relationship and had four children she loved and longed to protect, though she was barely an adult herself.

Berry's husband was a coal miner and often out of a job. When he was home, Eddie would look after the children but never helped with housework or cooking. His demands for sex were incessant, and Berry's book shows starkly that rape in marriage is not a myth. Over the years they were together, Eddie had at least one affair with a young girl and made sexual advances toward several others.

Berry realized she had to get help when she began to have self-destructive thoughts. She also came to identify with a "sister of silence"—a local woman who was brutally murdered by a deranged and self-centered ex-husband.

Berry was fortunate to eventually establish a career as a writer, then as an investigative journalist. Her association with law enforcement strengthened her resolve to leave Eddie, but

more importantly, she began to get positive feedback from people in the community about her accomplishments, affirmation that helped her overcome her negative self-image.

Berry's story is not an easy read, though her prose is strong and her memory acute, her story is very disturbing. She paints a vivid picture of a naïve woman trapped in a frightening relationship with a cold, manipulative man who asserts dominance through constant emotional belittling and superior physical strength.

With the help of her therapist, Berry began to overcome the guilt she continued to feel over her early sexual abuse. By learning to identify with the innocence of her own young daughters, Berry came to see that her husband was at fault, "that men who chose to use and abuse both girls and women [are] weak, and deficient in some way." Berry is to be commended for digging so deeply into her harrowing past. It is clear that she has written this book for other women, for her children, and for herself. *Sister of Silence* won first place in West Virginia's Writers Competition as an Appalachian-themed book.

Barbara Bamberger Scott