



Test of Faith: Surviving My Daughter's Life Sentence

Bonnie S. Hirst

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Recounting the events that rocked her foundations, Bonnie S. Hirst's memoir Test of Faith is also about unconditional love and maturing faith.

Bonnie S. Hirst's powerful memoir *Test of Faith* is about how her lifelong belief in the power of prayer was shaken to its core when her daughter was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole.

Devastated when her thirty-five-year-old daughter, Lacey, was declared guilty of murder, Hirst watched in shock as Lacey was led away. She left behind her two young children and her husband, a drug user whose unfaithfulness had precipitated her conviction.

Pointed and poignant, the text draws a stark contrast between Hirst's life prior to her daughter's conviction and what happened after, when Hirst's scaffolding of faith and community failed her. Concerned with what people might think, the proud and self-sufficient Hirst had created the image of a perfect family, with herself as the perfect mom. After Lacey's incarceration, she was shamed, ostracized, and assailed with shocking newspaper stories about her daughter.

Hirst describes living "in the pit of worry," with sleepless nights, nausea, and incapacitating depression. The book reveals intimate details about her feelings of impotence and anger as her attempts to hang on to gratitude and hope plummeted into despair and things continued to worsen for Lacey.

Hirst recalls how the drug underworld proved to be insidious, exemplified by the chilling discovery of a suspicious person lurking near Lacey's house, and the book conveys the harsh realities of the American justice system, showing how it affected Hirst and her family. It also details Hirst's struggle to reconcile her belief in the efficacy of prayer with the fact that God appeared deaf to her appeals, in writing that makes her emotional exhaustion palpable.

Powerful, precise, and detailed, the story moves quickly toward the climactic verdict. But there are also calm scenes, as when Lacey, out on bail, stays with her family and finds a brief reprieve. Related descriptions are tender and warm, balancing the tension as Lacey's situation barrels toward disaster. Those who stood with Hirst and her family are responded to with heartfelt thanks, and the book highlights how much good true friends can do.

Uncomplicated prose makes both facts and emotions easy to comprehend, and the book follows the timetable of Lacey's case in detail. The narration is natural and to the point as Hirst struggles to direct her prayers toward her daughter's freedom, revealing her conflicted emotions when she turned to mantras, affirmations, and other sources of comfort that left her fearful that anything other than Christian prayers might anger God. Glimpses of Lacey and her father's thoughts help to flesh out their characters, but are minimal.

Event-driven, the story builds to a climax that is as heartrending as it is expected. Recounting the events that rocked her foundations, Bonnie S. Hirst's memoir *Test of Faith* is also about unconditional love and maturing faith.

KRISTINE MORRIS (August 15, 2019)

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