

We Shall Overcome

Abbie Johnson Taylor

iUniverse

Unknown (pp)

978-0-595-44619-3

An activist for people with visual impairments, Abbie Johnson Taylor, has penned *We Shall Overcome*, paying homage to the popular spiritual song of the same name. The novel's protagonist, Lisa Taylor, is a successful young businesswoman who happens to have a visual impairment. She is adored by her family, elderly neighbors, and the customers of her father's coin-operated machine repair shop in Sheridan, Wyoming, where she works.

Lisa navigates through life with ease until she falls in love with a police officer, John Macintosh, whose father is a strict sheriff and whose sister is also visually impaired. Lisa fears law enforcement because of a traumatic incident as a child. Lisa, John, the sheriff, John's sister Beulah, and other characters must overcome fears and deeply held beliefs as Lisa and John proceed happily with their relationship.

With so many novels portraying people with disabilities as one-dimensional, readers will find Lisa and Beulah to be interesting, multi-faceted characters. While Lisa is more self-assured and less sheltered than Beulah, Taylor deftly showcases both characters' vulnerabilities, expertly showing that no two people with disabilities are the same. In addition, the author contrasts the family's expectations of the two blind women, illustrating how familial attitudes affect people with disabilities. Of course, Lisa and Beulah also have traits unrelated to their blindness; and therefore, neither one is completely defined by her disability. Furthermore, Taylor has both women talk about sex and romance, debunking the myth that people with disabilities avoid sex.

Given the novel's positive portrayal of people with disabilities, it is sad that several plot points strain credibility. For example, the repeated misuse of police services for pranks without repercussions; unrealistic treatment of date-rape perpetrators and victims; and how readily characters forgive one another for committing thoughtless acts. At one point in the story, a rape survivor succinctly and casually describes a rape kit and her decision to testify against her assailant. Soon after the ordeal, the same character immediately jumps into a relationship with a kinder man.

Elsewhere in the story, one of John's friends attempts to force Beulah to look at a maimed corpse when John takes her to the jail to teach her a lesson for unclear reasons. Moreover, the extent to which the story is autobiographical may annoy some readers. Author and protagonist share a surname, a hometown, hobbies, and have fathers with the same occupation. Also, the sheer number of minor characters makes it easy to confuse them. Aside from these minor writing and editing weaknesses, *We Shall Overcome* has much to offer readers searching the bookshelves for positive portrayals of blind women.

JILL ALLEN (October 21, 2010)

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