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Zoo Station

Christiane F.
Christina Cartwright, translator
Zest Books (Jan 1, 2013)
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“I wanted to be the kind of person who had a cool nickname,” says Christiane, for whom, like most teenagers, fitting in was paramount. Little did she know at twelve years old that her admiration for the cool kids would lead to a swift descent into addiction and prostitution by age fourteen.

Originally published in Germany in 1979, Christiane’s story gained widespread popularity throughout Europe and was made into a movie a few years later. This new translation marks the thirty-fourth anniversary of the original book, and it remains as relevant today as it was then. The need to feel accepted and part of a group, dysfunctional family dynamics, and societal pressures are still issues faced by teenagers, and drugs are perhaps even easier to come by.

Christiane moved to Berlin from a small village when she was six and discovered that the kids were different there, colder and meaner. She missed the sense of camaraderie she had shared with her old friends. Her abusive father made her home a tense and unsafe environment so she searched for acceptance elsewhere. She began smoking cigarettes so she could hang out with the cool kids at school. Then she joined them at a local teen dance club located in the Protestant Center at the housing project where she lived, where adults tried to educate the hundreds of kids who would show up about the dangers of drug use. Meanwhile, the kids were drinking, smoking pot, dropping acid, and popping pills right under their noses. Christiane soon moved on to a new night club called The Sound, where she fell in with another crowd, fell in love, and escalated her drug habit. Within a few months, she was hooked on heroin, and it was only a matter of time before she was prostituting herself at Berlin’s infamous subway stop, Zoo Station, to afford to her next fix.

Christiane’s voice is strong and clear throughout this book, and her story reads like a novel. Her journey into the life of a full-blown junkie is the same one thousands of kids follow to this day. This book offers an honest and thoughtful insight into the self-delusion that perpetuates the cycle of addiction, withdrawal, and relapse that she experiences over and over, while her family watches helplessly. Excerpts from her mother, law enforcement, and other adults in contact with Christiane round out the story.

This book is recommended for both teens and their parents. Teenagers will get a first-hand view of how quickly drugs can devastate their lives, while parents will gain insight into what to watch for in their own children who may be experimenting. Though her story is shocking, it is one that plays out over and over again for kids who turn to drugs.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (February 5, 2013)

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