

**Lorrie J. (2015). First Gear: A Motorcycle Memoir.  
Calgary: Inanna Publications and Education Inc.**

Reviewed by: Ryleigh Ference, MacEwan University

Lorrie Jorgenson's "First Gear: A Motorcycle Memoir" is a powerfully written book which tells of the author's childhood physical, emotional and sexual abuse. She tells the story as she rides on her motorcycle – named Thelma D. – from Ottawa to Winnipeg and back. During her ride she shares stories of her childhood growing up in the seventies with a violent father, alcoholic mother and her three brothers. "First Gear: A Motorcycle Memoir" is conclusively a book of courage, survival and recovery from childhood trauma that went on into her adult life, taunting her with addiction, depression and anxiety. Jorgenson, now fifty years old, and living with Multiple Sclerosis, is an author that provides extraordinary amounts of honesty in her writing as well as unbelievable imagery.

Jorgenson talks about her childhood trauma throughout this book. Rather than identifying 'Eric' as her father, she decides to use his name as he is the main one putting her through the abuse that she had endured. Her brothers were receivers of physical and emotional abuse from Eric, however, Jorgenson also received sexual abuse as well. It happened in her own home, and her mother Bev knew about it but did nothing to stop it because she was afraid of Eric and what he might do if she tried to take a stand. I believe that she chose to talk about her childhood abuse and how it affected her far into her adulthood because she hopes that telling her truth would be able to help others dealing with troubles of their own.

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This memoir can relate to the studies of alcoholism and the lack of coping resources stated in the textbook (p.280). Alcoholism is a predictor of a multitude of things including child abuse. Individuals tend to relax their restraints against physical acts of violence. Jorgenson's father, being an alcoholic, made him violent towards his family when he drank. Jorgenson had traits that could have made her an abuser, being an alcoholic, having a lack of coping resources and isolating herself, being a few. Without healthy and effective coping resources, the likelihood of violence was increased, however Jorgenson had isolated herself when she was at her worst. Thus, the result of violence towards others was not readily available.

To be able to grasp at the root cause of the abuse, we would have to take a look at Eric. He is the individual who had produced most of the pain that Jorgenson had suffered with over her lifetime. To be able to fully understand why he did this, we have to delve into the book a little more to see that he is damaged and takes out his anger on his children. Because of the way that he had decided to deal with his anger, his children and wife had each been punished with different forms of abuse that would cause all of them, some more than others, to feel as if they were suffering in a life that they would rather live in a more positive way. That being said, it is described that not every day was a bad day. As children, they enjoyed their times playing together as a family and appreciated the excitement that they had experienced and the difficulties they had to endure. It is because of these hardships that Jorgenson had decided to write a book. She needed to tell her truth and how it had impacted her.

The battle that Jorgenson has faced throughout her whole life is inspiring and is what I find most interesting about this book. For instance, as recounted by the author: "A couple of weeks

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before King Kong flattened me, my family doctor sent me to see a psychiatrist” (p. 126). This psychiatrist is what made the ‘big monkey’ come down on her and drove her to isolate herself, drink and eventually end up using a razor to rid herself of the pain she felt. The way that she rose up to say, “Fuck the big monkey” (p.130) and fight back was uplifting and should have each and every one of her readers cheering her on.

When writing this book, Jorgenson wanted to tell of her battles against more than anyone will ever know and her success in taking back her life and making it her own. Truthfully, this is a story that would empower anyone in overcoming their own hardships and getting their lives back or even just grasping at the fact that we should all be living more freely and openly without regrets. I enjoyed her truthfulness and the amazing imagery she had when telling stories of her past and throughout her motorcycle adventure, it made me feel as if I were along with her. In my opinion, I found very little limitations within this book. Jorgenson is a powerful woman and writer and it shows through the whole of this piece. The flow of this book works out well, from the motorcycle ride to the flash backs; each and every one of them has an admirable movement from each scene to the next. This makes it easy to follow along with where she is at in her life and her story. However, I did not appreciate how lengthy some of the pieces of her motorcycle trip were, I found that the point of this book was to tell her story of her childhood and the abuse that she had endured and have the motorcycle journey as a way to guide us through those stories but I felt as if sometimes it became too focused on the trip. Because of this it could be possible for a reader to become confused as to where we left off on her personal autobiography.

The dedication page states “For Paula”. I believe that this shows that Jorgenson wanted to

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tell Paula of her troublesome past and what means she had to endure to overcome the struggles in order to be happy and find somebody to truly love. The academic audience that would appreciate this book would include those studying psychology as the material of this book covers many issues as well as an inside look at what abuse is, along with what it is like to be abused. Those researching these areas may find this book thought-provoking.

Overall, I appreciated the entirety of this book. From cover to cover, “First Gear: A Motorcycle Memoir” was remarkably pleasing. The front cover had a heavy yet humbleness to it that I enjoyed; it set the scene of what the read was essentially going to be like. There were heavy and emotional parts that had left readers heartbroken, yet there were parts filled with humour that provided a ‘laugh out loud’ moment. It was easy to tell what kind of set of emotions Jorgenson wanted to provoke from her readers and she has achieved that. When I was reading the book, I was feeling the emotions that she had laid out in the book and I found it to be an astounding ability to be able to make readers feel what the author was feeling as she went along the journey that she was describing. Jorgenson shows great talent when it came to the writing style of this book, from the words read on the page to the way everything was laid out. I found it to be admirable.