

**Jorgensen, Lorrie. (2015). First Gear: A Motorcycle Memoir.
Toronto: Innana Publications.**

Reviewed by: Megan Nixon, MacEwan University

Lorrie Jorgensen's book, "First Gear: A Motorcycle Memoir", is a biography that tells the story of her life, as well as documents her week long journey through Northern Ontario on her motorcycle. Jorgensen focuses on her family and their family dynamic as she grows up; giving the reader insights to her struggles with sexual and physical abuse, alcoholism, and her mental health. By vividly reflecting on her childhood, it allows the reader to understand and connect with her, whether they have gone through similar experiences or not. Jorgensen's story displays many themes such as her familial relationships, her mental health, and her struggle with addictions and her disease. Jorgensen shares her story as a way to reflect on her life and make sense of everything that she had experienced, ultimately finding peace and forgiveness for her past.

Jorgensen tells the story of her childhood in flashbacks while she describes the road trip she is taking on her motorcycle. Many flashbacks include her family and their relationships. Her mother, Bev, was a difficult woman who never gave Jorgensen the support and love which she craved. Jorgensen and her three brothers underwent constant physical abuse from their father, Eric. Eric was not only physically abusive to Jorgensen, but also sexually abusive, and raped her throughout her childhood. Bev was fully aware of the physical abuse and even underwent some of it herself, but when Jorgensen was sixteen, she finally told Bev that Eric had been sexually abusing her. Bev's response was to run off to her sisters for a time, not even bothering to do anything about

it or ask and see if Jorgensen was okay. Eric's sexual abuse affected Jorgensen on many levels, and she describes it as the root of many failed relationships with friends, family, and partners, as well as, her own negative feelings of self-worth. Later in the book, Jorgensen also finds out that Eric is not her biological father. Bev kept this secret from her all her life and she only figured it out herself, in her adult years, from a cryptic letter Bev had sent her. Jorgensen expressed many times throughout the book how she just wished her mother would love her and protect her and her brothers like a mother was supposed to. "Bev didn't protect me. How she didn't take care of me and how if she had, my life would be different, it would be better" (p. 233). All she wanted was her mother's love. Near the end of the novel Jorgensen finds the courage to forgive Bev for all she's done and realizes that "[she] had placed so much of [her] self-esteem in the hands of two people who used [her], badly" (p. 472). She did not want to be defined by other people, especially Bev and Eric, so she forgave them and started to define her own self-worth.

Jorgensen throughout the book also participated in something she called "self trashing" (p. 39). Which she learnt from her parents, where she would put herself down, belittle herself, and would always think negatively. Jorgensen was told she was not smart enough or good enough by her parents, she started to believe it and continued to tell herself that. This really started to affect Jorgensen's mental health and self-worth. Jorgensen was fully aware of what she was doing to herself and fought back with a positive outlook to counter the negative ones throughout the book. Although it was a constant battle Jorgensen expresses her desire to beat her self-trashing, "My goal is to finish my life motivated, however long it is, and begin each day in a graceful, honest, reflective state" (p.134).

Throughout the book Jorgensen struggles with her mental health and her dependency on alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and food. Much of which is rooted from her childhood to cope and feel comfort and pleasure. In regard to her mental health, she was engulfed in depression for a very long time and was unable to surface from its clutches. One day, after seeing her psychiatrist, Jorgensen was pushed over the edge. She expressed, to her psychiatrist, that she was having difficulty and believed it was from her childhood abuse from Eric. Her psychiatrist responded saying “So, you're not over it yet” (p. 218). Jorgensen was shocked, she said that, "I found myself really, truly empty. My being had fled me” (p. 219). Jorgensen attempted suicide, but she was not successful. She then ended up in a psychiatric hospital. After being released, Jorgensen then decided it was time to go to the police about Eric’s abuse. This experience was eye-opening for her, it allowed her to finally do what she’s wanted to all her life; get justice for herself.

Eventually Jorgensen quit drinking, smoking, as well as, using food as a means of comfort. She described that “denial was my daily companion. It allowed me to truly believe I had a choice about my drinking. It helped me hide the fact that the need for alcohol was driving my thoughts and controlling my life” (pp. 206-207). She realized how she was no longer in control and wanted to change that. She was accepted into University and found a partner who also wanted to quit drinking, everything was falling into place. Until Jorgensen was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, an incurable disease. As unfortunate as this was, Jorgensen stayed true to her sobriety and with time said that she was “grateful for the disease” (p. 260). It helped her quit smoking, and she started working out, losing over forty pounds. Jorgensen's optimism and resilience is astonishing after everything she had been through and continued to face.

From beginning to end, Jorgensen displays the emotional growth she underwent during her road trip. She is able to reflect on her experiences with no interruptions, learning a lot about herself. She comes to the realization that she needs to forgive herself; she was not the cause of everything that happened to her, only how she decided to deal with it. This was liberating for her; it allowed her to free herself from a tremendous amount of guilt that was holding her back. Forgiving herself brought up the idea of forgiving others in her life that have wronged her, like Bev and Eric. Jorgensen says that she's "come to believe that forgiveness is very much about my mind, my choice to move on, to let go of the resentments. Forgiving them is letting their influence on my life dissolve" (p.415). She understands that letting the people who wronged her still affect her life was keeping her in her past, and by forgiving and setting herself free she was allowing herself to have a future.

Jorgensen's story is emotional and powerful. Her hardships and experiences would be a beneficial read for those who perhaps struggle with, or have struggled with sexual abuse, addiction, mental health, and diseases such as MS. Understanding that all people's experiences are different, her story is still very inspiring and can help others relate, and perhaps not feel as alone. Jorgensen uses the book to express herself and bring awareness to abuse and the effects thereafter. The book is an example of what it means to be 'knocked down and get back up' time and time again. Other audiences that may benefit from the book are sociologists, women's studies, psychologists, and for educational purposes that brings awareness to mental health and addictions to name a few. "First Gear: A Motorcycle Memoir" was a pleasure to read, it was engaging, and inspiring. I found no limitations with this book. It was a true story of perseverance and resilience. I would recommend it to anyone.