**Greshner, Connie. (2020). Borderline Shine: A Memoir.
Toronto: Dundurn Press.**

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Connie Greshner's book, "Borderline Shine", is a truthful memoir and an unconstrained piece of literature that deals with issues pertaining to mental health and trauma. In her writing, Greshner portrays a story of complex trauma. She delves into the worlds of substance abuse, intergenerational violence, and shame through the storytelling of how her father murdered her mother and how years later she was able to find some remnants of security and contentment. In doing so, Greshner provides real life examples of how resilience, hope, recovery, and meaningful and healthy relationships can lead to the overcoming of adversity. Throughout this book, Greshner helps us to question the lens through which we view mental health and trauma.

With unflinching honesty, Greshner provides us with the raw truths of violence and substance abuse. Greshner is no stranger to intergenerational violence. Her home-life was dominated by her father's violence, both before and after he killed her mother. Her older brother Steven took after their father and portrayed moments of violence. Greshner dated a man named Jace who also had a short temper. "His hands were the size of my feet, and when he smashed one into a countertop or a wall, it was like a sledgehammer. I could not handle this potential for violence, and my hysterics would escalate the situation" (p. 155). Greshner, herself, also portrayed violence from time to time. When in a fight with her boyfriend Jax, she grabbed a glass picture frame off the wall and threw it at his arm, cutting it open, and she was forced to call 911.

Both Greshner and the people around her participated in substance abuse whether it was alcohol or drugs. She was exposed to alcohol at a young age saying, “Despite the havoc that alcohol had created in my family, I was still a child of prairie culture, and a rebellious one at that. Adolescence was a time of experimentation, and alcohol was my first experiment with substances” (p. 40). The result of this drinking at a young age was negative. She would go on to escape her feelings through alcohol; she would go on to become an alcoholic and a “party girl” for many years and this greatly affected her mental health and personal relationships. Greshner described herself as a “functional drunk” (p.171) and “an afternoon drunk” (p.171) which means that she worked, parented and took care of the house while allowing herself to drink, but only in the afternoon. “Alcohol disinhibited me and I battled shame and guilt after these episodes. I didn’t understand why I engaged in such risky adventures. I didn’t know why I needed so much attention, approval” (p. 70). Greshner felt that getting drunk got her attention and approval. Alcohol and approval addiction is further intertwined when an insecure person enters into a romantic relationship with someone who uses drugs or alcohol. This happened to Greshner several times. She did acid with a boyfriend named Jax, mushrooms with a boyfriend named Jim, and cocaine with a boyfriend named Andy. She grew up in a dysfunctional family, had a dead mother, and a father in prison, and was abandoned by her aunt and uncle at a private Catholic school in a different country, so it is understandable that this trauma led to an increased risk in alcohol use. As well, growing up in a dysfunctional family also correlates to having dysfunctional relationships as an adult.

The theme of rebellion and escape was prominent throughout this memoir. The escape for Greshner was both mental and physical. The mental escape was through substance abuse, but the

physical escape was constant and was a lot for a child and young adult. Greshner never really had a fixed address to call home. She went from Ponoka, to the U.S.A, to Red Deer, Vancouver, Surrey, Edmonton, Lethbridge, to the Sunshine Coast and more. There was nothing constant in Greshner's life (except for the struggle with mental health) and there was nowhere for her to truly be at home. With this constant moving came a lot of rebellion. She was sent to a Catholic boarding school in the States, and with the routine she was faced with, she rebelled. Greshner did not listen to any of the teachers and didn't do any chores. She even escaped from the school one night and ran across the highway to different towns, wanting to escape the life she had. Greshner's resistance to conformity helped her to escape from parts of her life that she deemed as not well, both physically and mentally.

The main underlying theme of this book is trauma. Greshner experienced extreme levels of trauma, on top of violence and substance abuse. Losing her parents, being sent away for school, and never having an adult to really take care of her led to detriments in her mental health. Greshner states "I was a strange combination of overachieving nerd and crazy, dysregulated trauma child" (p. 102). She received straight A's throughout school and university despite experiencing childhood traumas, and although she was academically smart, Greshner experienced a lot of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and an eating disorder. She did seek out professional help for her depression and was referred to a psychiatrist who was not of any significant help to her. The depression became worse at the end of high school with Greshner saying that "I had no one in my life. I was adrift, waiting for the next step. I barely kept depression at bay and felt a deep grief rumbling under the surface" (p. 57). The anxiety that she felt was near

unmanageable. She believed that the rejection and abandonment that she endured was her fault, and that belief disrupted her ability to seek or accept help. She starved herself as punishment for feeling guilty for her actions. Her eating disorder prevented her from eating meals with others, enhancing her loneliness. It was difficult for Greshner to manage depression, an eating disorder, and anxiety at the same time; she felt depressed and highly anxious all the time. She wrote “My eating disorder kicked into high gear, and I binged, purged, and exercised as much as I could to manage my anxiety” (p. 59). Greshner also portrayed many instances of suicidal ideation as well as recurrent suicidal behaviour due to the trauma she faced. Later in university, Greshner discovered that what she had been feeling had a name. Borderline personality disorder. She found it oddly comforting to recognize her symptoms on paper and felt as though what she was feeling might not be so crazy after all.

The intent Greshner had when writing this book was to fight the stigma of mental health. She hopes that the “readers take away the message that judgment breeds shame and more suffering. Non-judgement breeds connection and healing” (p. 239). There are no identifiable problems in this book, it is a raw and honest portrayal about the struggles of mental health. Greshner focuses on her slow recovery from complex childhood trauma, and how she uses her experiences to now help and relate to clients at her job as a therapist. She breaks the secrecy around trauma and advocates for a non-judgmental response for people struggling with mental health. In saying that, the audiences that may benefit from this book are mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, therapists, and psychologists, as well as sociologists, doctors and those struggling with their own mental health and trauma. This book is also for those who do not struggle with mental health, for

a reader who cannot relate to this story in any way the hope is that they develop compassion and learn that mental health is not to be stigmatized. "Borderline Shine" is a pleasure to read, emotional, engaging, and informative. I would recommend it to anyone interested in the field of mental health.