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

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Connie Greshner's book, "Borderline Shine: A Memoir," is an autobiography. It is an honest, raw, and touching story about resilience and breaking free of family patterns. The book takes the reader on a journey through the powerful themes of severe traumas, fighting personality disorders and alcohol abuse, unstable family patterns, and finding a way to recover and live a happy life. Connie Greshner has a rough start to life, but as she grows older and gains perspective, she starts to see patterns in her own behaviour and learns how to overcome her challenges. She crawls, rises, and takes a few steps only to fall again. However, she does not give up. Connie Greshner's story is an inspiration to anyone who has struggled with anxiety and depression and shows the reader that recovery is possible.

Connie's childhood was never just safe and comfortable. She has good memories of feeling safe in her father's arms and going fishing or driving with him, but also bad ones, of his untamable anger and violence. When Connie is only eight years old, her world falls apart. She is taken to her auntie Hilda and uncle Jack's place, where her auntie tells her that her father has killed her mother (p. 11). Little does she know that the next thirty years of her life will be filled with feelings of abandonment, anger, depression, anxiety, eating disorders and excessive drinking.

Her mother's death is not spoken of in the family (p. 11), and it becomes an unresolved trauma for the little girl to deal with on her own. Connie is taken in by her Catholic auntie Hilda

and uncle Jack, but always criticized and never heard (p. 11). When she is ten years old, they send her to a Catholic boarding school in Kansas. Connie feels abandoned by her family, and the lack of support turns the quiet and intelligent girl into a rebel. After a couple of years at St. Mary's school, Connie moves to her oldest brother Steven's house. He took on the role of head of the family at the age of seventeen, and at age twenty-one, he and his wife Cathy take in twelve-year-old Connie (p. 31). Steve is as protective and caring as their dad, but also as feisty, angry, and drunk as him. This inter-generational anger, aggression, and alcohol abuse will also follow Connie for many years to come.

At the age of sixteen, Connie moves in with her boyfriend, Andy, and starts a chaotic and erratic life without somewhere to call home (p. 45). She is rootless, angry, aggressive, drinks too much, and has difficulty figuring out what she wants in her life. Her traumas and family patterns overshadowing her hopes and dreams. To overcome the depression and anxiety that weighs her down, Connie begins to drink, and she develops an eating disorder (p. 75). For many years, she leads an unhealthy and unhappy life. When she seeks professional help, she is met by head-shaking psychiatrists and councillors that do not take her seriously (p. 56). The depression and lack of support lead to several suicide attempts, the first one stopped by her dog, Dick (p. 81), and the next one ending with her boyfriend, Jax, making her throw up all the pills she had taken (p. 89).

Connie decides that she wants to study psychology. Her dream is to become someone who can help troubled people like herself. In a psychology class about personality disorders, she encounters a description of Borderline Personality Disorder, which rings a bell of recognition in

her system. She self-diagnoses herself as having BPD (p. 118), which, despite a lack of treatment methods, helps her understand some of her issues. This first glimpse into her condition enables Connie to begin the slow and steady climb toward recovery, as she starts to apply to herself her newly-honed skills in psychology. Working in the psychology field later in her life gives Connie a sense of purpose, which also helps her recover.

Connie continues to drink, and that habit seems to be almost impossible to get rid of. Even when she has a safe home with a job that she likes and a healthy family, she cannot seem to be able to stop drinking. However, when she starts having problems with her heart, she decides that drinking is no longer an option (p. 200). That is the moment when she finally starts to get fully healthy and dares to dream and pursue those dreams.

Behind the whole premise of "Borderline Shine" is the importance of family for a person's life. Since her mother's death, Connie has a tough time with her family. Seeing her siblings awakens all the feelings Connie has never explored and accepted because there was never space for her to talk about her trauma. Her sister, Theresa, tries to be there for Connie. Finally, after long periods of escaping her family and the underlying discomfort, Connie starts to open up to her siblings. A significant turning point in Connie's life is when she agrees to join her other siblings for Christmas one year and visits her mother's grave (p. 185). Connie faces her pain and lets it rip through her and cleanse out the trauma. Her grief is transformed, and she can now start to enjoy being with her family for the first time since she was eight years old (p. 185). Connie does not think she wants to have children, but when her boyfriend, Jace, says that he wants to make a family, she agrees (p. 152). At the age of thirty-four, Connie goes off birth con-

trol and gets pregnant right away. While pregnant, she easily does what she has never been able to before. She stops drinking (p. 157). Her daughters' birth gives Connie a purpose in life, but the stress related to being a mother and babysitting a third child as a source of income has her reaching for the beer again (p. 164).

It is not just one change that leads to Connie's recovery. It is the cumulative effects of many things: Studying psychology and working with people with mental disorders, creating a safe home with Jace and the girls, reconnecting with her siblings and finally going through the pain of her mother's death, growing older and gaining perspective, and having the support from old friends and siblings. In the end, Connie realizes that life is not easy, and it is not meant to be. Her brother's words on his deathbed sum up what Connie has tried to figure out her whole life: "you gotta play the cards you're dealt" (p. 219). She learns to take one challenge at a time and focus on what is essential in her life, and her concluding paragraphs sum up her new perspective on life:

I have learned to be humble in the face of the power and mystery of forces unseen. I see evidence of this force in all of the beauty of this world, from the miracle of my children's faces to the magnificence of the sun on the water. I believe that this force is the love that exists within and between, and whenever I find myself uncertain of action, I try to choose love. I have learned to see light and reflect light, and have faith that I will return to the light when I pass through times of darkness. I have learned to shine (p. 230).

Connie Greshner's experiences in life have taught her to appreciate the beauty in the little things. Because of everything she has been through, she does not take life for granted, which makes her appreciate life in a way that most people do not. She is honest and raw in her descriptions, and her clarity reminds the reader that even though life might look bad right now, it is not over, and

beauty will show its face when you look for it.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in real stories about personal development, finding meaning in life, and working through trauma to realize one's potential. "Borderline Shine" is an interesting read for students of psychology and sociology, as it opens a window into how challenging life can be and the importance of a supportive network in combating mental disorders and recovering from severe trauma.