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

Reviewed by: Cassandra Devlin, MacEwan University

Connie Greshner's book, "Borderline Shine" is a moving story that follows the author's battle with the effects of childhood trauma, which later leads to her journey towards recovery. Greshner dives into the haunting event that shaped the rest of her life - at just eight years old, Greshner's father murdered her mother. This traumatic experience sends Greshner through a life of uncertainty, addiction, and the constant search for a sense of security. Simultaneously, the book highlights Greshner's ability to steer further away from her life's adverse effects through her love of nature, writing, and studies, followed by the reconnection with her family and herself. Greshner now happily lives with her family on Vancouver Island, working as a mental health therapist guiding others through their troubles with complex trauma.

Trauma presents itself as a central theme addressed in this memoir. Greshner goes into detail about how her mother's death affected her life. After being moved out of her own home, this further prevents Greshner from registering what has happened around her. As recalled by the author, she spends "the next two years trying to figure out the world" that she lives in (p. 13). This feeling didn't seem to stop for Greshner as she continued to grow up. Starting as a rebellious schoolgirl, Greshner fell into a life where she had "no sense of moderation or self-control." (p. 41). Alcohol, male-attention, and an eating disorder acted as coping mechanisms, which Greshner

believed would help control her anxiety. With already having felt rejection in her childhood due to her family's lack of consistent support after her mother's death, it seems she confided in these coping mechanisms where she truly felt wanted. Despite Greshner finding temporary satisfaction from these unhealthy coping strategies, readers witness depression and anxiousness cast a shadow over her as she struggled to understand her life. Greshner admits that she didn't understand her feelings and accepted that her abandonment experiences were her fault. (p. 69). Greshner takes readers on an intimate and emotional ride through her trauma, which consists of her struggle with uncertainty and her inability to address grief.

Throughout the memoir, Greshner experiences a rocky relationship with the rest of her family. She recalls stories of her dysfunctional family, stemming back to her mother's murder. Greshner and her siblings' distance themselves away from each other as they all individually struggle to cope with the grief caused by this tragedy. She struggled with her reckless lifestyle, depending on alcoholism, which, according to Greshner, "defined her family" (p. 39). Greshner recalls that she and her siblings "drifted together and apart, growing up in different worlds" (p. 14). However, no matter what distance got in-between Greshner and her siblings, they had always managed to find each other. Greshner evidently proves this bond throughout the memoir as she recollects certain moments with her siblings, such as her older brother Steven providing her with a place to stay or her sister Theresa supporting Greshner when her depression sent her to the hospital. Readers later see the family come together as Steven was diagnosed with cancer. Regarding this situation, Greshner says, "What mattered was now, what mattered was love, and we could do what we could to help our brother." (p. 224). This heart-warming statement empha-

sizes the theme of family and its importance through this memoir. Readers will witness the bond that Greshner's family had no matter what obstacle came their way.

The tragedy within Greshner's family caused her to be sent off from place to place, leaving the author longing for a sense of security. Without her staying in one place throughout her childhood, she never got to feel permanently safe. Greshner states that "predictability provided a sense of security." (p. 141). She speaks of several different places and people that have provided her with a feeling of familiarity. For example, at her school St. Mary's Academy, the routine and her friends were familiar to her as that was all she had to lean on at the time. Greshner also shows this need to feel safe as she speaks of several workplaces, including Fletcher's and Kentwood, which similarly provided Greshner with a familiar routine and welcoming individuals. Greshner described that she was searching for "the achievement, the security, the missing piece to my inner peace." (p. 172). Greshner continued to fight for that secure feeling regardless of the many setbacks she had endured.

Despite the author battling the mentally exhausting impact of complex trauma, Greshner's desire to have a home is something that seems to have kept her going. In desperation, she would latch on to anyone or anything that would introduce the idea of a home. Though, out of the apartments, trailers and relatives' homes that Greshner resided at, none of them provided a permanent home for her. She expresses this multiple times throughout the book, emphasizing the importance of having her own home. This recollection of longing for a forever home can be presented through this passage from when Greshner expresses her desire to escape her small

apartment: “My own house... what I had longed for with my whole heart and soul for my entire life. I had not had a home since I was eight years old, and as an adult I had moved often, sometimes up to five times a year. I had lived in dark, damp basements; I had lived on skid row. I had lived with an aunt who hated me and men who left me. I wanted a home.” (p. 124). A stable home was something effortlessly given to people around Greshner, whereas she had to fight for it herself. In the concluding chapters, Greshner’s determination reaches success which can be shown through the uplifting moment when she talks of having found her home on Vancouver Island with her family, finally finding peace in her life.

Greshner’s resilience shined through the cracks of many stumbling-blocks throughout her life. The author displays an inspiring representation of growth, emphasizing the idea that no matter how many hardships may bring one down in life, they can get back up. Greshner’s recollections demonstrate her character development as readers witness her strengths begin to defeat her inner demons increasingly. To highlight the correlation between her strengths and recovery, Greshner speaks of numerous aspects of her life throughout the book that managed to help her bounce back from difficult situations. Firstly, Greshner’s bond with nature was something she could rely on from time and time again, allowing her to escape her troubles and find peace. (p. 79). Secondly, Greshner’s passion for school, writing, and her job became a distraction as it steered her further away from spiralling back into the world of substance abuse and depression. Regardless of how she would fall back into that spiral, her love for psychology and writing won in the end. Lastly, Greshner connects the theme of family to her growth. Her friends and family provided Greshner with a support system that would pick Greshner back up again whenever she was at her lowest.

For example, the author recollects one of her closest friends, Maeve having a significant and positive influence on her life. Maeve accepted Greshner “unconditionally” (p. 106), which provided her with the support she needed to grow and find stability. This acceptance and approval similarly came from her family; with Greshner and her siblings being there for each other, it allowed her to know she always had people by her side no matter the distance. The author concludes with her achievement of self-acceptance as she focuses on her family and her passion for clinical psychology.

As a strong advocate for mental health awareness myself, “Borderline Shine” was a pleasure to read. Greshner’s transparency in her writing was refreshing and genuinely eye-opening to the world of trauma and mental health. This memoir lacked flaws as it left me on the edge of my seat as I moved from one chapter to the next. Although some memories recollected in the autobiography were quite saddening, Greshner’s openness about the situations made this read intriguing. Greshner’s reminiscence of the complex trauma she endured may be of interest to clinical psychologists, along with those teaching or studying psychology. This recommendation can go for sociologists and sociology students as their interests would lean towards the factor that Greshner’s family plays in the book. Throughout this book, the author’s personal experience could greatly benefit the mentioned academic audience and their research.