



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

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Connie Greshner's "Borderline Shine: A Memoir" recounts her experience as a young woman learning to overcome the extreme trauma associated with her mother's murder. The resulting byproducts of mental illness and addiction suppressed her pursuit of happiness for nearly thirty years. Until a pivotal point in her life when inner peace, solitude, and confidence, flowered within her--the laden duvet of depression that had anchored her to darkness was lifted. From the age of eight, Greshner felt abandoned after her mother was shot by her father amid an alcohol-fueled rage. The resulting emotional distress would prove to be tormentuous for a great deal of her life.

The trauma and subsequent abandonment issues experienced by Greshner condemned her to a severe form of depression that would shadow every decision, action, and relationship of her teenage and early adult life. As a young woman Greshner experienced the loss of her mother, abandonment by her aunt and uncle, and again by the perceived abandonment of her brother, Steven. These events fueled her lust for independence and autonomy that Greshner was not yet ready to face. Despite her young age, Greshner pursued independence through a relationship with Andy which would only

bring to mind “fears of rejection, of abandonment, of being alone, of being unlovable”, that would resurface in all of her intimate relationships to come (p. 45).

Greshner's depression and anxieties often manifested in an uncontrollable rage sparked by jealousy, fear, and sadness, and fueled by the sweet relief of alcohol. Alcoholism plagued the entire Greshner family--her brother, Steven, her father, and her grandparents all drank, predisposing this young woman to her seemingly inevitable fate. For years, alcohol would consume Greshner and despite being aware of the problem, she was unable to stop, stating on numerous occasions that “booze was [her] savior” (p. 62). Addiction would continue to perpetuate Greshner’s self-destructive behavior which, at times, was worsened by her severe depression. During one of Greshner's darkest hours, intensified by alcohol, she decided that “[she] could not keep living this way. [She] felt way too fucked up to be loved...”, Greshner attempted suicide (p. 81). After the event, Greshner's boyfriend at the time, Jax, left her. Despite her history of rage, Greshner stated “I wasn't even angry when he left that time. I didn't blame him. I pushed down the sadness, hurt, grief, and pain, and I focused on school” (p. 89). She would in fact begin to indulge in the world of academia more than ever, but the departure of Jax would initiate a time of “out-of-control drinking and promiscuity” (p. 129). This illustrates the recurring nature of Greshner's battle against addiction. She relied on alcohol to soothe the pain that she had endured, and despite having seen the destructive effect it had on her and her relationships with others, she returned to her vice as a way to escape reality.

Due to her mental illness, Greshner cycled through many relationships, jobs, and different degrees of poverty. Following her attempted suicide, she experienced hospitalization and interacted with mental health services. Despite seeing many medical professionals, inclu-

ding psychiatrists, the road to recovery was incredibly slow in part due to the setback that resulted from her alcoholism, but also from the grievances she never truly faced. While studying psychology at Simon Fraser University, Greshner was met with the harsh realization that her mental illness was impeding all aspects of her life. Borderline Personality Disorder is described as “a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects,... marked by impulsivity in early adulthood” (p. 171); words that resonated all too well with Greshner, so well in fact, that it implored her self-diagnosis. This would remain a deeply guarded secret by Greshner, as it was only shared with one other person. However, it marks a pivotal point of self-discovery that would lead to one of the greatest revelations of her life. The epiphany would not occur for nearly a decade but would be molded by the knowledge accrued throughout this time.

I had been using those skills, ... intuitively. I had slowly and painfully practiced mindfulness, acceptance, and gratitude. I had figured out how to be effective in relationships, and I had learned ways to self-soothe and tolerate distress. I had shifted my core beliefs from “I am too fucked and unloveable, and the world is dangerous” to “I am perfectly imperfect and I am safe” (p. 223)

A woman replete with a negative self-image and fear had finally removed the apron of silence and remorse that engulfed her happiness for years. This statement elucidates two salient shifts in self paradigm: (1) Greshner had realized her healing, which reinforced to her that she was making strides in the direction of a better life, imploring a positive self-regard; and (2) a change in schemas from the erroneous fear and skepticism of the world and herself to the acceptance and gratitude for the imperfection that makes her unique.

The family was an integral factor for both the positive and negative aspects of Gresh-

ner's life. After the murder of her mother, Greshner would lean on her brother Steven for protection, as she "knew nothing would hurt [her] when Steven was around" (p. 228). In addition to the safety that she felt while with Steven, he was also the only family member who shared Greshner's deep, caustic anger that protruded their everyday lives through uncontrollable rage and excessive alcohol consumption. Although Connie and Steven would have numerous moments of anger towards each other, they would always recognize the pain they shared as a parallel in one another's life. In addition to Steven, there was Jace; the only other man in Greshner's life from which she felt inseparable. While Jace was the father of her children, he also served as the pillar of instrumental support that structured her adult life. Jace's family was ordinary, interdependent, and loving; they were everything that Greshner's family was not. At first, Greshner would be intimidated by the close ties that Jace held with both his mother and his father, but in time she would grow to see the importance of having close relationships with her family. Despite the preliminary anxieties towards the thought of an interdependent family structure, Greshner would begin to rekindle the broken relationships that isolated her from her sister, Theresa. This transition would mark the beginning of Greshner's recovery, as "Theresa's gentle support and faith helped [her] to overcome these fears, and [she] resolved that ... somehow [she] would find a way to use [her] degree ... to build a good life for [her] kids" (p.167).

The family was perhaps the most momentous aspect of Greshner's recovery. However, family conflict was also the source of many of her downfalls. Regardless of the frame of reference, the family was an integral part of Greshner's struggles, accomplishments, and in general, her life story. When Greshner's first child Maria was born "a seed of hope had germinated within [her]" (p.166). Like many times before she was absorbed by her duties: "I

was a mama bear, I would fiercely defend my cub” (p. 161). This time, however, was different, as the focus shifted from herself and her struggles to the beautiful daughter, who laid before her. Greshner would go on to have a second child, Maria, which would complete the family she longed to have. The confidence and strength induced by Rose, Maria, and her husband Jace, would be that of a pillar to the structure that is her mental health, solitude, and happiness.

Greshner’s intended audience was elaborate, varying from social psychologists and sociologists to the average individual experiencing depression and anxieties in their own life. Social psychologists and sociologists would be greatly intrigued by this synthesis of literature because it deals with the external factors that influence personal cognitive dispositions. Furthermore, this memoir offers insight into dealing with depression and coping with severe trauma that would catalyze change for the better in individuals with situations congruent with that of Greshner’s. This memoir was intriguing, informative, and exciting, and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. However, the memoir was, at times, hard to follow, as Greshner jumped from memory to memory, often not distinguishing between her thoughts and the memory itself. Improvement could be done in terms of laying out a specific timeline at the beginning of flashbacks to help guide the reader through events, giving them a better understanding of how Greshner had evolved as a person, and what factors influenced specific changes. Regardless of the small discrepancies found, I would most definitely recommend this book.

“Borderline Shine” illustrates self-growth, emotional education, and the life story of an incredible woman who faced seemingly insurmountable trauma. Through academia, Greshner was able to understand her emotional distress and apply methods of psychology to overcome incredible adversity and an overwhelming addiction. Furthermore, with the aid of friendship, family, and persistence the veil of depression that masked her pursuit of happiness for many

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years was lifted, allowing Greshner to escape the darkness of depression and flourish through everyday life.