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Out Of The Darkness: The Story Of Mary Ellen Wilson



Synopsis

IT BEGAN WITH ONE ABUSED CHILD . . . A Little Girl's Terror: By April of 1874, nine-year-old Mary Ellen Wilson had been beaten, cut, and burned by her foster mother for more than seven years. She had never once been allowed outdoors, her keeper locking her inside a tiny, dark closet while she was away. In the coldest New York winters, the child slept on a piece of carpet on the floor, only a threadbare quilt to warm her. A Caring Woman's Determination: When a concerned social worker named Etta Wheeler learned of the child's plight, she made appeals to the police, church, and the courts, but with no success. "Don't interfere between parent and child," they said. While others may have given up, Etta was determined to help little Mary Ellen. An Unlikely Hero For An Abused Child: In a desperate last resort, Etta went to Henry Bergh of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Would this man who was so kind to animals help? Surely the child had the same rights as a defenseless, abused creature. Bergh heard Etta's story, and the events that followed forever changed the course of child protection in America. Forgotten for over a century, Shelman and Lazoritz bring the story of "Little Mary Ellen" to light for the first time since it appeared in the pages of the New York Times, the Brooklyn Eagle, and the New York Tribune in 1874.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a book that does not shy on detailing the terrible reality of child abuse, albeit one occurring in the 1870s, 140 years ago. While times have changed, with laws stopping this cruelty, the abuses inflicted on children in the 19th century were often ignored by the authorities. Mary Ellen Wilson certainly was not the first child in this era to suffer abuse at the hands of adults (As readers will know, 1820s France and 1830s England also witnessed this) but hers was unique as it resulted in the first laws protecting children in the United States. Mary Ellen was born in New York in 1864. Her father was killed in the battle of the Wilderness during the American Civil War fighting for the Union. Her mother was desperate to get a job, working at a hotel, but turning her over to a woman who cared for children, paying a weekly fee. The mother became drunk, and the woman told her her daughter had died, but this was not true. She turned Mary Ellen to the city's orphanage. She was adopted by Thomas and Mary McCormick, claiming to be her parents. Thomas died shortly after taking her in, and Mary remarried to Francis Connolly. She hated Mary Ellen, for reasons the author never explicitly states. In any case, she severely abuses the little girl for the next 6 years, her cruelty rivaling that of modern day child abusers. The only clothing Mary Ellen wears is a tattered white dress, and is kept barefoot. Throughout the book, Mary Connolly beats her with a whip for going outside of her closet to read a book, for dropping an iron, for going outside to the bathroom, for protesting about being locked in the closet, for urinating on the floor, for crying about her strings, and many other trivial reasons. She is also emotionally abused, being called the devil's child, locked in a closet all day long, burned with an iron, has her face cut with scissors, performs heavy labor, and kept half starved. The book also tells about Henry Bergh, who founded the SPCA, and Etta Wheeler, a missionary who witnesses Mary Ellen's abuse and tries to help her legally. She finally secedes after going to Bergh, and she is rescued from her abuser, who is jailed for one year. She has a long and happy life afterwards. I think the punishment her abuser suffered was too easy for the years of cruelty she inflicted on this child. I know prisoners hate child abusers more than any other, so I am sure she was warmly welcomed (Sarcasm) I wish I could go back in time and rescue Mary Ellen from this cruelty, and spoil her good, and ensure the a-hole who abused her was thrown into a pile of cow manure like the scumbag she is.

I'm so grateful this book was written. It is a torturous but inspiring read concerning the founding of two still flourishing societies--the SPCA and the SPCC--for the protection of our animals and children. Out of Mary Ellen's young existence of daily unconscionable brutality and dearth of love came boundless good. What a brave wonder she was! An incredible story of what seems to be Divine architecture and construction, placing the right people in the right places at the absolutely right times.

Such a great story, but so sad. After all the abuse Mary Ellen had to endure and she still came out of it very loving. A must read!

I'm not regarded as intelligent and not an avid reader, for that matter either, but *Out Of The Darkness* captivated me. I found that I could'nt put the book down. Waiting at (Cheap Tickets) with a number 33 in my hand, just hoping I'll finish chapter 12 before they call my number. Behind a long row of cars waiting for the light to turn green, hoping that it would not until Henry finished his rescue of a cat. That night, in my dreams, I could hear the echos of little Mary Wilson crying. I feel this is a very important book, a book that begs to be on the wide screen so people like me, can slurp fruit punch and gnaw on dots while unscard by childhood brutality watching a small army of angels battle the fierce monster. Surely out of the thousands who've read *Out Of The Darkness*, one will have some influence in Hollywood and take the lead.

My genre is mostly horror/zombies but I've read almost everything that Eric Shelman has written so I had to buy this. It was an incredible book. I was in tears through a lot of this book because it is based on a true story and my heart broke reading about Mary Ellen. But the book was so well written and was so good that I had trouble putting it down. I was finally at the last 92% on my Kindle when it locked up (i'm getting a new one because of this) and it spent a crazy 3 days wanting to read that last 8%. Last night when I tried to turn it on it worked perfect! I told everyone to leave me alone so I could finally finish *Out of the Darkness*. I'm so glad I gave this book a try as it did not disappoint!

So interesting to see the beginnings of the society for the protection of children. Mary Ellen's resilience is incredible. So glad she was rescued and had the opportunity to go on to enjoy life.

I am so glad I read this. While I am a huge animal lover, it is sad to think that we had an organization to protect animals before we had one to protect children. Amazing story that I could not put down.

This was a good book about an abused child in the 1800's and how the founder of the ASPCA was able to help her get out of her terrible situation. I enjoyed reading about how the ASPCA got started and also the SPCC. It is horrible to know how some people treat children and animals, but it is also nice to see good people get involved to help stop it.

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