

## An Alcoholic's Collateral Damage

**G. Michael Sanborn**

ReadersMagnet

(288pp)

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*Childhood scars delay but don't preclude an intelligent boy's adulthood flourishing in the ultimately triumphant memoir An Alcoholic's Collateral Damage.*

Often bleak, G. Michael Sanborn's memoir *An Alcoholic's Collateral Damage* is about growing up with an alcoholic mother.

Sanborn's family moved often, looking for a better life. Life got worse instead, as each move exposed cracks in their stability. His parents fought. Sanborn's father moved out and his mother became dependent on welfare and alcohol, neglecting her children. Sanborn spent summers working on his grandparents' farm and found that he excelled in structured settings. As soon as he was able to, he made his own money and, with the help of mentors outside of home, won a scholarship to college.

In covering Sanborn's childhood, the book's focus is quite narrow. All is understood through the prism of his mother's alcoholism, and negativity reigns. Traumatic incidents pile up; sibling fights during car rides, being teased at school for having homemade lunches, and medical emergencies are recalled. Also covered is his mother's physical and verbal abuse of her children and his grandparents' dislike of his father. Often, decisions were made in accordance with his mother's level of inebriation. Summaries of the negative effects of her addiction appear at the end of each section; these are repetitive, though.

A few historical events are referenced, fleshing out the period somewhat. In the face of the civil rights movement, Vietnam protests, and political assassinations, Sanborn felt confused, unable to relate to chaos. Indeed, a sense of confusion reigns: "I hated my mother. I loved my mother. How can two strong and opposing emotions exist simultaneously?" Such open-ended questions vivify a book that often feels distant. Indeed, Sanborn's mother and others in his life are rendered in flat terms, via recollections of physical fights and verbal putdowns and not much else. Few interactions are shown, and affection is absent; the tone is dispassionate.

While early on, the book seems most concerned with amassing evidence of the damage inflicted upon Sanborn, the prose becomes more open in tandem with his first experiences of freedom. In high school, he flourished in the classroom, went on adventures with friends, and made plans for his future; for the first time, change seemed possible. Indeed, major changes did follow, opening up new vistas for him. He found solace in being alone, explored nature, and nourished his imagination. Thus—even though its ending includes a breaking point between Sanborn and his mother—some triumph becomes possible.

The revealing memoir *An Alcoholic's Collateral Damage* is about surviving childhood challenges to pursue education and personal fulfillment.

MARI CARLSON (December 26, 2024)

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