

In Pursuit of Radio Mom: Searching for the Mother I Never Had

Terry Crylen

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In Pursuit of Radio Mom is a candid memoir covering a woman's early family troubles and her long road to personal recovery.

Psychologist Terry Crylen's introspective memoir *In Pursuit of Radio Mom* is about healing from childhood neglect.

Raised in a 1950s Chicago South Side neighborhood and in a working-class, Catholic family, Crylen sought her mother's attention, hoping to please her. But her mother was distant and too surrounded by her numerous children for Crylen to feel loved; further, her mother left home during her "black spells." Crylen felt abandoned in such moments.

Early on, Crylen's feelings of abandonment lead to a weighted text that reads like a slow-burning series of grievances. There's coverage of Crylen's mother's acerbic judgments and self-pity too, with the book cataloging the effects of both on Crylen. Such brooding moments are recurrent; the book's recollections of them are winding.

Crylen's mother, though she's central to the text, is also recalled without much dimension. The possible reasons for her bitterness (her difficult upbringing; her thwarted dreams) are addressed in fleeting terms. Indeed, though her mental health concerns prevail, reflections that press beyond the outlines of what happened to her are reserved for the book's later chapters, which consider the possibility that she was dealing with depression. In Crylen's childhood, such burdens were borne in silence, though. The family's later move into a larger house somewhat alleviates this flattening: Crylen began to notice similarities between her mother's troubled past and her own life and to develop a more nuanced view of their troubled relationship.

The book's accounts of Crylen's fraught relationship with her mother are interspersed with brighter stories about her learning to explore her community on her own. She nurtured feelings of bravery in herself while listening to vibrant Baptist music streaming through a church's open doors and finding small kindnesses at a corner store. Such excursions are recalled in poignant language; in Crylen's lonely childhood, they resulted in palpable relief. In her teenage years, she continued to care for her family, but she also dreamed of independence. Isolated scenes are used to color in the spaces between Crylen's youthful privations and hopes: she felt humiliated, like a misfit; she experienced heartbreaking violence. But she also endured, making her way toward adulthood.

The prose is sharp and filtered through considerations of how Crylen's unresolved pain trickled into her adulthood. There are touching insights proffered as well: Crylen notes that her lack of parental guidance made her somewhat naïve, leading to harm. And as the book progresses, more tension is relieved: Crylen lets go of self-blame; she becomes a clinical psychologist and undergoes therapy herself. In the end—fed by accounts of Crylen's own growth—the book imparts hope that generational patterns can be changed.

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KAREN RIGBY (August 26, 2023)

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