

Standing Up: Making the Best Out of Surviving the Worst

Mary L. Devine

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A memoir about personal emergence in the wake of abuse, Standing Up is a revealing text.

Mary L. Devine's triumphant memoir *Standing Up* is about emerging from domestic violence to pursue a career in law enforcement.

After a heady courtship, Devine married Vince, a "fun-loving musician" and construction worker. The couple's happiness was troubled by arguments about finances; subsequent fights increased in intensity as Vince abused alcohol and cocaine. After a violent attack, Devine was rushed to the hospital and persuaded not to return home with her husband.

Determined to learn self-defense after her divorce, Devine took Taekwondo lessons. She also began a romance with her instructor, Doug, who seemed like a special "soulmate." But Devine's second marriage also deteriorated when her charming new husband drifted into infidelity and substance abuse.

The book conveys common elements of domestic violence with clarity, including the betrayal, fear, and self-doubt experienced by survivors and the psychological manipulations of their abusers. After the harrowing fight that sent Devine to the hospital, Vince wiped the blood from her body "as if he were performing a sacred ritual." When Doug's addictions led to criminal behavior, Devine's emotional "mudslide" led her to hope that their relationship could somehow be saved.

In covering Devine's burgeoning interest in becoming a police officer, the book's tone shifts to gradual empowerment. Though the account of her academy training is somewhat methodical, these details anchor Devine's renewed sense of purpose. Then in her thirties and older than most recruits, she pushed herself to develop the required physical stamina while learning complex laws and procedures. Later, the regimented order of roll calls is contrasted with chaotic 911 dispatches, which could range from barking dog complaints, shootings, or volatile domestic conflicts.

At times, the book's pace is slowed by mundane information, as with the inclusion of collegial chatter about coffee shops and eateries after Devine was promoted to detective. But there is also a sense of further personal emergence as Devine's abuse experiences are tempered by her law enforcement training. When interviewing a woman beaten by her boyfriend, Devine looked at her "expressionless" face and remembered feeling the same numb anguish and denial. And during her account of a murdered infant's autopsy, Devine's compartmentalization of emotion and investigation is conveyed with skill; while focused on the baby's fatal injuries, she was also fatigued from hunger. She ate lunch during the procedure, in a grim environment that "smelled of decomposition."

The later portions of the book are peppered with police lingo, as of putting a suspect into the interrogation "box" and the jocular use of nicknames between officers. The narrative also strays into the occasional tone of a true crime book, as in when Devine calms herself before conducting a victim interview and contemplates her reflection in the bathroom mirror: "A detective stared back. She...had no marks on her face, and stood ramrod straight. She stared at me

confidently in her navy-blue Dior suit.” More forthright and intimate is the frustration that’s expressed about how abuse charges are often dropped by victims or reduced by legal maneuvering, and about how there is “no time to grieve losses.”

Devine begins dating another officer toward the memoir’s end, though this relationship is depicted as somewhat peripheral, with both partners maintaining emotional distance. The book reaches a reasoned conclusion, sharing how Devine chose to prioritize her police work over deeper romantic involvements.

Appearing with supplemental resources for domestic violence victims, *Standing Up* is a powerful memoir about survival, redirection, and triumph.

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