

We're Here to Help: When Guardianship Goes Wrong

Diane Dimond

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Diane Dimond's ambitious book *We're Here to Help* uncovers the devastation caused by mercenary guardians and conservators who exploit their court-appointed powers over vulnerable people.

Dimond, an experienced investigative journalist, uncovered an astonishing number of cases where predatory individuals gained legal control over people thought unfit to manage their own affairs. Some predators were family members; others were "professional" guardians and conservators who handled hundreds of cases at a time. A forceful warning about the dangers of court-ordered competency proceedings, the book also exposes how the court system's tradition of confidentiality prevents transparency and accountability.

Dimond's introduction summarizes the potential losses—of autonomy, asset depletion, isolation when guardians forbid visits, and even illness, injury, and death. There are some generalizations, though, before the book's specific analysis of the Britney Spears case. Concrete evidence of embezzlement and mistreatment in that case became public—a convincing validation of the earlier generalizations.

The sheer number of cases cited is persuasive, though imprecise phrases ("is believed to be," "is known to be") undermine this somewhat. Still, as the prose adapts to complement the content, the book ably describes horrors committed against helpless individuals in rich and dramatic form. The primary aim of putting readers on alert is achieved. The book is more direct when it comes to delivering practical advice to family members and friends of wards, as with suggestions that they get to know the clerk of the court where the guardianship is being administered.

With elements of true crime and self-help, *We're Here to Help* advocates for systemic reform as it diagrams the labyrinth of guardian and conservator legal proceedings via wrenching cautionary tales.

MICHELE SHARPE (September / October 2023)

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