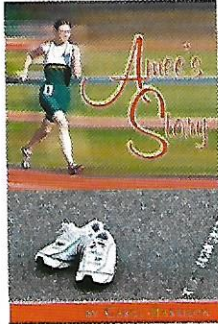


& Classics

A review of sensitizing books that center on *exceptional* issues

Amee's Story

By Carol Harrison
Guardian Books, 2010
207 pages, \$15.00



In this festive period where faith and religion are central to many families, Carol Harrison's *Amee's Story* may be the perfect holiday read. Harrison is Amee's mother, and with purpose, conviction and unyielding optimism, she chronicles her now adult daughter's exceptional life from birth to 18 – a life marked by frequent bouts of illness, hospitalizations and significant physical, developmental and learning challenges stemming from diagnoses of microcephaly, epilepsy, cerebral palsy and hemaplegia.

While the Harrison family is forever altered following Amee's birth, Harrison emphasizes the positive in Amee's many successes and ensures that Amee's potential is defined by her abilities; not by doctors, some of whom give Amee a very grim prognosis, nor by teachers, who callously ignore her limitations and push her beyond her capabilities, nor by peers, who purposely exclude her because of her differences, nor by Amee herself, who at times is incredibly discouraged and frustrated by her challenges. Harrison's resolve to help Amee achieve her full potential shines in her daughter's rise from comatose baby fighting for her life in the NICU, to a young woman

In many ways, my young adult daughter is still like a little girl. She needs supervision although she is able to stay home for a few hours at a time. Reminding her to drink and eat remains an everyday occurrence, since her brain still does not tell her she is hungry or thirsty. Routines are still required.

Any variation needs to be worked through in advance if possible. There are days when I wish she could do a little more. That's when I must stop and remember how far she has come.

- Amee's Story

whose achievements – including graduating from high school and earning multiple awards as a track runner with Special Olympics – surpass everyone's expectations.

Amidst the highs and lows, life goes on in the Harrison home and family milestones are celebrated. Relatives graduate from high school and siblings marry and start families of their own. And through it all, Amee has to come to terms with the fact that it will take her significantly longer to reach some of the very same signposts, while she may never achieve others at all. Harrison also mourns this reality: "I grieved the milestones that were delayed, waiting in hope for them to happen, and the milestones, like getting a driver's license or living on her own, that never came to be."

Harrison is a devout Christian, something she makes palpably clear throughout her book. References to God, prayer, faith and miracles abound, as Harrison credits Amee's survival and subsequent flourishing to a higher power. And though it is published by a company that largely issues Christian-themed material, *Amee's Story* is far from a proselytizing tool.

Regardless of religious conviction, all readers will come away with a greater faith in humanity. It is a humanity exemplified by a mother's unconditional love and a daughter's unwavering courage.

The book's greatest flaw is perhaps its cover image; the colours and layout being somewhat reminiscent of the 1970s. In the case of *Amee's*

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