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Etched In Sand: A True Story Of Five Siblings Who Survived An Unspeakable Childhood On Long Island



Synopsis

Regina's Calcaterra memoir, *Etched in Sand*, is an inspiring and triumphant coming-of-age story of tenacity and hope. Regina Calcaterra is a successful lawyer, New York State official, and activist. Her painful early life, however, was quite different. Regina and her four siblings survived an abusive and painful childhood only to find themselves faced with the challenges of the foster-care system and intermittent homelessness in the shadows of Manhattan and the Hamptons. A true-life rags-to-riches story, *Etched in Sand* chronicles Regina's rising above her past, while fighting to keep her brother and three sisters together through it all. Beautifully written, with heartbreaking honesty, *Etched in Sand* is an unforgettable reminder that regardless of social status, the American Dream is still within reach for those who have the desire and the determination to succeed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Regina Calcaterra's powerful memoir, *Etched In Sand*, begins with her flying over the ravaged neighborhoods of Long Island following the hurricane, Super Storm Sandy. As chief deputy executive of Suffolk County, it is Regina Calcaterra's job to regulate, not just post-disaster funding, but any government resources her county receives. Calcaterra's career in public service is not

accidental; growing up with four siblings and an abusive, neglectful, alcoholic mother and an ineffective foster child system, Regina was determined to make a difference. Despite the extreme poverty and constant abuse from her mother, a fragmented education and unpredictable housing, Regina was able to help raise herself, and her siblings, to become stable adults and parents. The story as to how Regina grew up to be the person she is today is candidly written and absolutely heartbreaking. Regina and her older sister, Camille, were the true parents of the five children. Every time their mother, whom they all called Cookie, found subsidized housing in either a cockroach-infested house or even an apartment above a glue factory, they knew it was only a matter of time until the landlord would kick them out for not paying rent. Traveling from house to house using garbage bags to carry their clothing, a bottle of hydrogen peroxide to finger brush their teeth, a half bar of soap to wash themselves and their dishes, the girls were always on the alert to sneak out in the middle of the night when threatened with eviction. As most of their welfare checks went towards paying for Cookie's beer and cigarettes, the children learned how to shoplift food and live off of the kindness of strangers.

Two adjectives that immediately spring to mind while reading this book are "stark" and "searing". It is stark in its descriptiveness of the abuse and neglect Regina and her siblings endured, and searing in the indictment of the failures of the social services networks and foster care systems that were seemingly totally incompetent in dealing with these circumstances. There are several things that make Calcaterra's memoir unique in the genre of "abused child" narratives. Obviously, first and foremost, is the fact that it is the story of an entire family which survived the almost unbelievable brutality of an insane and addicted parent without themselves succumbing to insanity and addiction. This would seem, given our current cultural mystique, totally miraculous. Then, although there were a few bright spots in terms of caring, helpful adults among the teachers and foster parents who occasionally intervened in the lives of Regina and her siblings, the stunning central fact is that - as the author says - the kids literally raised themselves and each other. Finally, although one brief mention is made of the possibility of sexual abuse perpetrated by one of Cookie's men, it is NOT the theme here; somehow, perhaps because child molestation has become such a "hot topic" in recent times, I believe it has tended to overshadow the much more prevalent issue of physical abuse and neglect. Calcaterra also makes it clear that while the neglect of others, including the children's' fathers, exacerbated their mother's abusiveness, Cookie was indeed the sole perpetrator of the beatings and other vicious acts of violence. Of course, the story ends triumphantly. Regina and her sisters and brother not only survive, but thrive.

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