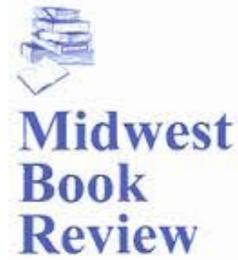


Midwest Book Review

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It's rare that a story line which reads like a romance proves to be a nonfiction memoir; but such is the case with *The Painting and The Piano*, which provides a dual focus on the authors' backgrounds and different family struggles and the love that finally brought them together. One might anticipate that their family struggles were similar; but in fact Johnny and Adrienne were polar opposites in many ways, as Johnny's Missouri upbringing of wealth and privilege contrasted sharply with Adrienne's middle-class Long Island Jewish upbringing.

This contrast in perspectives is reinforced with a tandem dual narrative style which brings out the different insights and worlds of each author and does a terrific job of contrasting their experiences. Another plus: chapter headings clearly say "Johnny" and "Adrienne", so there's no possibility of confusing their voices, which move adeptly and smoothly between chapters.

One main theme to these parallel autobiographies is presented early on in a discussion that highlights the importance and lasting impact of family: "...one of the core elements to our humanity is the mother-child bond. If that bond is removed or damaged it's like taking gravity away. All of a sudden that child's left spinning."

Johnny and Adrienne were lost for a long time, before finding each other and healing through their shared experiences. The nature of their dance, both individually and together, is explored in a powerful testimony to survival efforts and the capacity of humans to build new, better, nurturing lives from tough beginnings. Addiction, sobriety, and AA's influence on building these lives all come together in a memoir that is at once captivating, painful, and revealing.

There are many aspects to Adrienne and Johnny's journey: so many that some threads are left unexplored. To follow them all would have meant creating a weightier production that might have lost many a reader; but the beauty of this story lies its ability to stay on track and true to the heart of its message: that even spinning lives out of control can be made whole with a combination of luck, work, and new, positive life-affirming connections.

The Painting and The Piano's attention to detail and drama could have made it a powerful fictional romance; but the fact that this story of recovery reflects the true and purposeful paths of two very different lives makes for an even more important read contrasting angst and hope, and providing insights highly recommended for any family or individual struggling with addiction, recovery, and love: "We lived in such darkness and were so lost that we believe that if we can find our way to the light, then anyone can. We are blessed, but it's a blessing available to anyone willing to reach out for help and take the journey."