

'Too Deep': a sordid story

by **alice shukalo**

"Too Deep For Tears"; by Lucy Freeman with Jenny and Rosette Spinoza; Hawthorne, \$12.95; 235 pages.

"Too Deep for Tears" is the story of a mother and daughter who exacerbate and yet depend on each other's severe mental illness. The book is a frustrating and at times highly irritating account of Jenny Spinoza, who, beset with grim circumstances and psychological problems during her own childhood, brings a child into the world and bequeaths her an emotional illness so devastating that she never recovers.

The first part of the story is told by Jenny, and the second by the daughter, Rosette. The third section of the book is written by Lucy Freeman and is augmented with the analyses of several psychologists and psychoanalysts. The back flap of the jacket tells us that Freeman has written 40 books on psychology — a surprising bit of information considering how badly the book is written.

Jenny's writing style, despite the fact that she is a highly intelligent and literate woman, is casual to the point of being scattered. The narrative structure is nearly non-existent, and there are huge gaps in the story line. Although this is not a fictional account, the book would have benefited from use of some fictional techniques. The book suffers often from disorganization; Jenny jumps, in a matter of a line or two, from an externally oriented narrative to agonized soul-searching over why she did the things she did in raising her daughter.

Spinoza's sentence structure is the most bothersome aspect of her style. Incomplete clauses prevail, resulting in sentences where verbs follow commas, making the sentence sound abbreviated. For example, "I looked up, saw a young rabbi." "I seized the bottle, washed her hands..." Or how about this one? "I was optimistic about the future, thought, Maybe at long last something has worked."

This is not to deny the pain these two women have gone through, the agony of trying to cope in a world for which they are not equipped. In 1918 Jenny was born into a Jewish family in eastern Europe and emigrated to Brazil just before the persecution by the Nazis began. Her father had left the family for a woman 20 years younger than he when Jenny was 11, and her mother committed suicide not long after.

When Jenny moved to Brazil, she had to support herself and be a mother to her 3-year-old sister. She was on her own in her early teens, and the stress, insecurity and guilt resulting from these events did permanent damage to her psyche. She returned to Europe, and after a time, left

with her fiancé for South America, where they married and lived for several years. But she thought life would be better in the United States, and left him, taking their 3-year-old daughter.

When she found a job in her new home, there was some problem with working a long distance from where she lived, and so she had to find someone else to care for her daughter during the week. She placed Rosette in a sort of boarding home for children and visited her on weekends. When the child went in to dinner on Sunday nights, she would ask her mother to wait for her to finish, which Jenny always promised to do. As soon as the child turned her back to go to the dining room, Jenny would leave.

Other times she would sleep with her daughter, a practice that continued into Rosette's adulthood. She tells of abusing the child (and later, young woman), verbally by calling her garbage, telling her to take a whole bottle of thorazine and die, saying that she would rather die in a Nazi concentration camp than have her (Rosette) for a daughter. Between these confessions, Jenny whines and moans about what went wrong with her child, saying either than she doesn't understand what caused her daughter's illness or else justifying her own behavior because of circumstances.

This kind of dementia is infuriating and depressing to read. The daughter tells of withdrawing further and further during her mother's hysterical losses of temper, and at the same time finding it impossible to conceive of herself as an independent being in the world.

The question is, who wants to read a book like this? Aside from a professional or someone

specifically interested in case studies of mental illness, why would anyone want to read about such extreme stupidity and cruelty? Although the book is revelatory about the psychiatric profession, it has little value other than allowing the reader a glimpse into two lives filled with unhappiness and excruciating illness.

Come to think of it, maybe that is the value. Maybe some people who are considering having children will reflect on the story for a while and realize that being physically capable will not necessarily make them mature, wise, healthy parents.

Perhaps those considering having a child will realize from this book how easily and unintentionally a child can be irreparably damaged and take the time to assess their skills and education in being a parent. Let us hope some good can come from a book like this one, that perhaps some people who are considering parenthood will take time for self-examination and decide against it.



Jenny and Rosette Spinoza

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