



Etched in Sand: A True Story of Five Siblings Who Survived an Unspeakable Childhood on Long Island

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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.

Etched in Sand: A True Story of Five Siblings Who Survived an Unspeakable Childhood on Long Island Details

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From Reader Review Etched in Sand: A True Story of Five Siblings Who Survived an Unspeakable Childhood on Long Island for online ebook

Licha says

Call me cold-hearted but I just didn't buy into this story. I am ready to lump this one right alongside *A Child Called It*. The author never comes across as likable, in fact I quite disliked her. She at times acts arrogant, ungrateful, and entitled.

There's a point where Regina finally tells the truth to authorities and she ends up in a foster home where so is so ungrateful to the people who take her in and treat her well that I shut down any empathy I may have had for her.

It was a little hard for me to reconcile the abuse with how mouthy Regina seemed to be towards adults. There was never a clear picture as to the type of abuses going on and the extremity of it so it made Cookie an evil, one-dimensional character. The reader never learns how Cookie became this way. Cookie's parents do not have a relationship with Cookie or her kids, so did they play a part in who Cookie became? It didn't seem so, but then Cookie's brother appears late in the book and seems to be exactly like Cookie. Two people from the same family who are evil and abusive? That made me think that something else was going on in Cookie's family as she was growing up, yet the author never comments on this. It left too many questions unanswered.

I will say that the two older sisters bothered me with how they would abandon Regina with the two younger kids. It was odd how one of the sisters stayed for months at a time with a friend. Didn't the friend's family question why this girl was staying with them or try to report the abuse going on? Didn't the family question the welfare of the other four kids?

There were so many holes in the story. The story failed to touch me. So yeah, call me cold-hearted.

Terry says

Etched In Sand arrived yesterday- I was up into the wee hours of the morning to finish this beautifully written, compelling memoir. Regina Calcaterra, who is now a highly successful public advocate lawyer involved in NYSS Government, courageously shares the painful, desperate world of her impoverished childhood in suburban Long Island. She is the middle child of 5 siblings of 5 different but absent fathers, who suffer the abuses of their mentally ill, alcoholic and drug addicted single mother. They are often homeless, hungry, abandoned for many weeks at a time, in and out of school as they move from place to place. Resilient, fiercely protective of each other, and remarkably wise scavengers, they discover means of survival independent of any parental support. Their mother "Cookie" is a violent, abusive obstacle that makes survival much harder as she spends the little money they acquire on her own destructive needs. The book exposes the inadequacies of our social and economic safety net, and highlights the vital role played public schools and libraries as safe havens and support. Regina Calcaterra opens our eyes to what is right in front of us and yet invisible due to indifference and ignorance. You will never again take your toothpaste and brush for granted.

Carmen Blankenship says

Etched in Sand

This book put me through the wringer, and I was just the reader. Regina Calcaterra shares with us the brutal, torcherous, and horrendous abuse she and her 4 siblings endured at the hand of the mother Cookie Calcaterra. I am not sure I have felt such intense hatred for a character in a book in my entire life. She was a viscous narcissist who in no way should have been allowed to have children, let alone five. What is refreshing about this memoir is Regina Calcaterra's voice. I believe her, I ached for her, I rooted for her, and ultimately I respect her. She never whined and made sure to care for her younger siblings as her older siblings did for her. I thank Regina for highlighting the truth about our Foster system. More so, I respect her for immersing herself in helping others who are in the position she was in. In the epilogue, she eludes to the fact that she is encouraging Rosie to tell her story, and I really hope she does. These 5 siblings show us to be grateful and hold on those who love us. One of the best lessons I have learned is to not waste your time crying over those you think SHOULD love you, and focus on the people who DO love you.

I went Google crazy after reading this book and had to research everyone. I will root on these people and keep them in my prayers. This is an important and beautiful book.

Perri says

[was how other family members, teachers, neighbors ANYONE never seemed to be

Lectus says

Who is Regina Calcaterra? Well, currently, she is the Chief Deputy Executive of Suffolk County. Sounds fancy?

What is interesting is Regina's life. Raised by an abusive mother, Regina and her four siblings endured a tragic childhood facing hunger, physical, psychological abuse, and their share of foster care.

In Etched in Sand, Regina proudly recounts the early years of her life until she became a lawyer and a New York State Official.

The book is an inspiration for those living in poverty and whoever thinks that to succeed in life one must be born in the right family.

Lori L (She Treads Softly) says

Etched in Sand: A True Story of Five Siblings Who Survived an Unspeakable Childhood on Long Island by Regina Calcaterra is the true story of the abuse and neglect the author and her siblings suffered through - at

the hands of their mother and in a system that wasn't working as it should. Regina notes that her childhood made her very aware of how people in power can impact the lives of others and this knowledge helped lead her to her present day career in public service.

Regina has two older sister, Cherie and Camille, and a younger brother and sister, Norman and Rosie. Regina makes it clear that their mother, Cookie, was a drunk who was always avoiding the cops. She abused and neglected her children, abandoning them for weeks at a time. She stole, wrote bad checks, and always had a series of warrants out for her arrest. While Cookie's "aim is to put in as little effort as possible to get what she can from whom she can, including the system (pg.31)" Regina (and her older sisters) wanted to keep themselves out of the system entirely.

These children were in an impossible situation. With their mother there was rampant abuse and neglect for certain, but in the system (foster care) lurked other very real potential dangers. As I was reading this powerful memoir, I literally had to set the book aside several times. It was so frustrating to see a system that wasn't working or groups that were unable to work together or across state lines.

It was encouraging and inspirational to see how Regina overcame the odds. As an emancipated teen in the system it certainly appeared that she would be lucky to escape from her childhood without any long term trauma. To see how hard and tirelessly Regina worked to overcome her background is a testimony to her determination. The determination she had to try and keep her siblings together or in contact with each other was touching.

At the same time, Regina is trying to confirm that her father really is the man Cookie has always said is her father. He won't admit it is true but the evidence seems to confirm Cookie is telling the truth. It was good to see a conclusion to this question, although the fact that she had to ask it is heart-breaking.

In Etched in Sand Regina writes about her childhood in the present tense with a simple straightforward honesty which makes the narrative feel more raw and tragic, if that is even possible. We know she survived this horrific childhood to become the successful adult she is today, but while reading about some of the abuse... oh.my.goodness. It's probably for the best that it is written in this manner, a recounting of the facts as she experienced them when a child.

This is a well-written personal account of a woman who overcame a deplorable childhood. It might be difficult for some people to read about the abuse, but for those who can, the triumphant conclusion of Regina's story today will outshine the appalling facts of her childhood.

Very Highly Recommended

Disclosure: I received a copy of this book from HarperCollins and TLC for review purposes.

Avi Morris says

Whenever I start to read a memoir about a difficult childhood, I think, well, it probably isn't going to be all that different from the others, and I'm invariably wrong. Each story is horrific and moving with a unique version of living hell. In Etched in Sand, Regina Calcaterra recounts in vivid, simple prose the misery and chaos she and her three sisters and a brother faced living with their brutal mother, and too often without her as for months at a time they would have to fend for themselves as she abandoned them. The older kids in

turn had to become surrogate parents for their younger siblings, learning street survival, occasionally going into foster care with varying degrees of comfort.

Equally stirring is Calcaterra's description of her attempts to identify and connect with her biological father who never acknowledged her and the story of the way she and her family of survivors dealt with adulthood. Her own successes are remarkable, a real testament to her will to overcome. Hopefully her life and Etched in Sand can let others in her situation understand that they are not alone and that life does not have to be defined by an unspeakable childhood. A must read.

Sara Strand says

I don't know where to start this review other than to say this isn't a book for the faint of heart. As a parent myself, there were parts of this book that were really hard for me to digest because I don't know how a person could care so little for their child, let alone five children. I really struggled through parts of this book because you want to think that things can't get any worse but you know that they will and they do. And it really just affirms my personal belief that you shouldn't be allowed to just have kids. It's been proven that just because you can doesn't mean you should.

The story is basically the story of Regina and her siblings who have a mother who isn't just neglectful, but she's also abusive in her moments of actually being there, and these five kids are forced to become mini adults almost immediately. Whether it's trying to make every stop a home, searching for loose change, stealing food and other items to get by, and parenting each other- it's heartbreaking. What makes it worse is that you hope that child protective services would intervene but the kids don't want that because there is real danger in the foster care system. And you periodically hear news stories of foster care gone wrong but Regina's story highlights that it is a much larger problem than we maybe recognize.

Some of the passages about the abuse her and her siblings sustained... horrifying. I mean, I can't even imagine the level of rage a person must have to do such things to a child. There are no words and quite frankly, it's a miracle they got out of it alive. I mean, to do the abuse their mother did, what was to stop her from going totally over the edge?

The best part about this book is Regina and her overall triumph over her childhood. We all know a few people who have had a horrible childhood but instead of rising above it and recognizing that the past is the past, they dwell. Their entire lives are held back because it's all they can focus on. They lose perspective of what they could still be, the life they could still have, the good that is out there. Regina doesn't let her past get the best of her, instead she pursued her education and became a successful adult, a productive citizen, a beacon to others who are currently in a horrible situation.

I absolutely loved this book, though it was difficult to read and I did cry in a few spots. I don't even know Regina, but I am absolutely proud of her and just... there are no words. Check out her Twitter, Facebook, or website to learn more about her and her book.

Jen from Quebec :0) says

Unbelievable. In a reading challenge I am doing for this site, I needed to read a book that featured SAND on the cover- I know, right? So, I thought that this one looked promising and the Kindle price was right.

I am always interested in stories about the foster care system in America, as I see so many ways it can be improved upon- and I live in Canada! For this reason, I have always read the books of Cathy Glass, who

writes about her experiences as a foster mom, and thought reading a book about this life from the CHILD'S POV, especially one not affiliated with Glass and her stories, and especially with 5 siblings in the mix would be a good fit for me; and thus, I could meet my challenge requirement.

What I did not expect was a harrowing tale of a mother who neglected her kids for weeks at a time, was a hardcore alcoholic that inflicted horrible abuses upon her kids, and the amazing writing talent of Regina Calcaterra, which kept me up all night, unable to sleep until this book was finished.

Perhaps to SPITE her upbringing, Calcaterra became a lawyer, has worked for the Senate and works for programs that help out foster kids that 'age out' of the system. I learned a LOT about 'the system' from this book, as well as reading a page-turning, compelling story of the bonds between siblings. Great stuff, and a wonderful find! I love when that happens, don't you? --Jen from Quebec :0)

Cindy says

4.5 stars, but A BIG PROBLEM.

Great memoir. Bravely written and a wonderful example of internal and personal perseverance. **HOWEVER**, it's important to point out, a major disconnect in the author's perceptions. I'm still amazed at how emotionally stilted being in the foster care system can be for children who grow into emotionally stilted adults. I was taken aback at her contempt of the overworked, underfunded social service system. Her utter stoicism and total unappreciative nature for her foster parents is disheartening. I work for an agency called the Child Placement Review Board (CPRB). Our job is to make recommendations to the courts for "the best interest of the child" in question and to make sure that social services is doing their job. In other words, we oversee social services. If they're not doing their jobs, I know about it!

My feelings, as an educator, parent and a long time Executive Committee member of the CPRB is that you are damned if you do and damned if you don't! The book has changed my perception of how I, and my colleagues in the court system, do our jobs.

She says, at the end of the book, that forever families are needed and she is most certainly correct, but she offers **NOTHING** about how the foster families and social workers can do more. She directs her anger at the social workers, her biological parents and sometimes at foster families. She sees them all in cahoots working against the child, and this is nothing but wrong! Helping one homeless family with an intelligent child is one small act she offers back. But what about becoming an unappreciated forever family or foster family herself; maybe helping to change legislation regarding the number of cases social workers can be dealt? How about, at the very least, becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)? Give back more than your sad story of a book!

Phyllis says

This book, written by Regina Calcaterra is about the lives of her three sisters and brother growing up with an alcoholic and an extremely emotionally, mentally and physically abusive mother. I don't even know where to start with this. Sometimes homeless, sometimes living in the worst of living conditions these children managed to survive. Sometimes left on their own, with no food, no heat in the winter, in and out of foster care (sometimes good but mostly bad) how they ever survived is beyond me. I was going to give this book four stars but I know it will stay with me for a long time.

Clif Hostetler says

Reading this book is made tolerable only by the fact that the reader is informed in the Prologue that it has a happy ending—an example of survival beyond expectations from a horrendous childhood family environment. It makes a wonderful story when children from this sort of background are able to thrive as adults. I hate to consider how many examples may exist where children never manage to free themselves from the grip of poverty and abuse.

Whenever I hear a story such as this I suspect that there must have been a mentor somewhere that gave the necessary boost to the youth that enabled their escape from the bad environment. There were several sources of help in this story but one in particular was the author's fourth grade teacher.

People look but don't see. Why?
People hear but don't listen. Why?
People touch but don't feel. Why?

After I write a poem titled "Why?", my fourth grade teacher, Miss Muse, suddenly seems to take a special liking to me. She asked me to read it to the class, and then invites the other teachers from our corridor to hear me recite it a second, third and fourth time.

She begins to ask me when the other kids are busy, "How are things at home Regina?"

The day I tell her I'm moving I'm stunned when her eyes suddenly fill with tears, "Promise me you'll never forget that **you're special** Regina."

"Special?" I usually get dirty, ugly, poor, bastard, gross, nasty, slut, rag doll and whore, but never special.

Miss Muse continues telling me to always make sure I have a library card, that reading will help me wherever I end up. "Stay smart, stay sharp, and never ever stop reading," she whispers into my ear.

She hugs me so tight I think I might cry too.

The author managed to achieve legal emancipation from her abusive mother at age fourteen. Her desire to also free her younger siblings gave her a goal to work toward. Obviously the author was blessed with significant abilities which helped her take advantage of opportunities. She managed to work her way through college, and later through law school.

The following quote from her time in college offers an insight into what kept her going.

The older I get the more I'm convinced I've suffered for a reason. It's a reason I don't know yet. But for all of my twenty years it's been circling me, a forecast of something mighty. There's no way a person could be born into dysfunction, fighting to survive, and helping her family to do the same, without some purpose to give it all meaning. On the days that feel dark and endless I make myself a simple promise. I'll get out of bed in the morning, then I'll head up the hill to

class. If I put one foot in front of the other, day by day, I'll move closer to the light at the end of all the struggle.

This book reminds me of The Glass Castle. I can tolerate perhaps one book like this per year. But I'm haunted by the reminder of the existence of such poor family environments for some children.

God have mercy.

Here's a link to an article about the author Regina Calcaterra from Huffington Post by Maura Sweeney:
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/maura-s...>

Here's a link from the Hesston College website regarding Calcaterra's visit there. (I'm an alumnus of Hesston College)

<http://www.hesston.edu/2015/10/bestse...>

Bobbieshiann says

Heartbreak, abuse, and a broken system are what you find in this book. Though it is Regina who tells her story, she has 4 other siblings who share a horrible life as well. A mother's favoritism and selfishness leave her children mentally and physically hurt. A "mother" who is a drunk and uses her body to get what she wants, takes her children on a journey that will change them forever. Yes, in the end, they come back to each other and find a way for all 5 siblings to be a family again, but the price they pay to get there is dreadful. The system has failed these children several times and does not have to answer to the harm they caused. To barley help foster kids, and when they do, cut them off at 18 or 21 just to be alone again is saddening.

This families story is a lot to read but it does make you reflect on so much. Who we are as people and how selfish we can be. How we lack to contribute or do the bare minimum to help ourselves feel better.

"We're poor. We have no connections and even fewer resources, and we've learned to not trust anyone who says You can trust me. We've had to put our faith in the people who treat us coldly, who attempt to prey on our vulnerabilities and take advantage of us; but in the end, no one can really save us from our own hard reality. Every single one of us has had to climb out of our childhood and help ourselves". - Regina Calcaterra

Linda Toft says

It is absolutely amazing how the author of this book and her siblings rose above their tragic childhood! They lived their lives with a damaged mother who's contribution was to give birth to them then often leave them to fend for themselves, a flawed system that continued to fail these children and society's ability not to see what was happening to them! They experienced so much damage, mentally and physically from those closest to them, yet they have grown up to be so much more than their background! I am sure each one of them must still carry many of the scars from their nightmarish past, yet they have decided to allow life not to be based on the nightmares of their past, but the opportunity and right to the joys of the future! Hat's off all of them. This had to have been a very difficult book for the author to write. Revisiting a horrid past can be almost as damaging as living it! I hope her telling sheds more light on the needs of so many children! Many live right under our noses who are experiencing verbal, mental and physical abuse. As these children did, they are afraid to tell for fear of being separated from their siblings, punished or other reasons so they carry the abuse in silence. Thank you Regina for giving a voice to, not only your siblings and yourself, but to thousands of

children in need of love, proper care and the rights to the basic needs of life!

Petra X says

The book's a genuine tear-jerker. Five little children all abused, a couple of them worse than the others with beatings and imprisonment, starvation and whatever else their mother (their five fathers were not present) could think up when she was present and not off on one of her months-long jaunts. You might think this was in some far-off country, but no it was in NY.

They were let down time and again by social services so much so that they felt all the abuse was worth it just to stay together. With encouragement the author emancipated herself at 14, hoping, with her two older sisters to be able to take her younger brother and sister away from the hell. But she had been lied to by the social worker and for long years she wasn't even allowed to see them.

Fortunately, all of them made it out of poverty and have families of their own. The author became the most successful, an attorney and a writer.

I hope this book makes a difference. Regina Calcaterra hasn't just written a book she also heads a committee on helping children in care. She's written a good book and I don't think it will be her last.

When I wrote this review a couple of days ago I included a personal anecdote, as I do. It inspired my usual troll(s), to send me friend-requests with a lot of hatred. I thought that by only allowing friends to comment it would solve the problem but it didn't as there is no way of blocking friend request messages. So I've cut the review and cut my comments.
