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TITLE INFORMATION

OFF MY KNEES

From Skid Row to Sunset Boulevard

Julie D. Summers

manuscript (191 pp.)

BOOK REVIEW

A woman fights to overcome drug dependence as well as repair frayed relationships in this debut memoir.

Summers, who's currently on the governing board of the nonprofit People Assisting the Homeless, describes an idyllic childhood in Pennsylvania. She was born Diana Rae Essig, and she, her parents, and her two brothers were relatively happy until a job change in the late 1950s uprooted their lives, leaving them in financial turmoil. The author, once a model student, lost interest in school, especially after her father died in 1960. Her life reached another turning point when she became pregnant as a teenager in 1965 and adults convinced her to give the baby up for adoption. A short time later, when she wanted to find her son, she took up sex work in order to be able to pay steep legal fees. Her life spiraled into habitual use of drugs, including prescription pills and meth. Things started looking up, though, when she began dating an encouraging, wealthy man, though he was married. She became an active community member in West Hollywood but continued to struggle with family relationships, particularly with her mother and her mentally ill son. Summers manages to pack a lot into this brief remembrance. She memorably presents details of her early years, including a wonderful variety of home-cooked meals, and paints clear pictures of more difficult times, including her later experience in prison. Some scenes feel truncated, however; readers, for example, may yearn for more about the author's association with the Hell's Angels motorcycle club in 1980. Summers' candid voice also effectively addresses such subjects as rape and drug abuse without relying on graphic depictions. In addition, she frankly discusses her son's psychological condition as well as occasions when she felt she made serious mistakes. The author ends her book with a "self help guide" and a collection of personal musings to inspire readers to tackle their own problems.

A refreshingly honest and intimate account of a troubled life.

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