



From Carnage to Triumph: A Brutally Honest Tale of International Adoption

By Karina Holosko, M.A. English Lit|October 3rd, 2022

“When you have a child with special needs, they remind you every day that their life will never be what you wanted for them, or for your family. With every sunrise comes a new darker twilight. The wound never stops bleeding.”

When the Bough Breaks: A Mother’s Story of Carnage, Courage and the Triumph of Faith (Woodhall Press) is an inspiring, brutally honest and heart-wrenching memoir by Nancy Ferraro. She shares with us the profound depth of her commitment to her adopted son, George, who was a victim of horrors and abuse as a child in one of Romania’s orphanages.

It all started with Nancy Ferraro’s dream to adopt a baby from Romania and grow her family. But soon, Nancy, her husband, and their son, Joey, were thrown into chaos with no warning and no say in the matter.

When George called Nancy mother and her husband father, she fell in love. But, those were among the only words George knew. Did he really understand the meaning of them, or was he expected to learn the words to impress his future adoptive parents? Though there were some signs that something may be wrong, she put those fears aside when she was presented with a file claiming he was a mostly normal boy. But George’s past was darker and more tragic than Nancy realized during her first visit with him.

TRAGIC REALITY OF GEORGE'S LIFE IN ROMANIA

It is possible that George may have started as a perfectly normal child, but his circumstances gave him no chance of developing into one. He had been housed in an orphanage in Romania, which the United Nations later discovered was one of many death camps for children.

In Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu declared himself president and dictated his fascist regime until 1989, outlawing abortion and birth control in his efforts toward "population control." With the idea that his regime could do a better job raising children, he confiscated them from their mothers and families and placed them in state-run orphanages. Relief workers were shocked and horrified when they opened the doors to the orphanages and found children "packed in, elbow to elbow, many completely naked, deprived of human contact, near starvation."

George came from that hell. Once back in America, doctors described him as feral. He was diagnosed with a number of developmental and behavioral disorders, which shaped the rest of Nancy's life.

LIFETIME OF TRAUMA AND ABUSE

As a result of all this trauma, George was a violent child. He had no impulse control, and this led to regular and terrible bouts of violence. Ferraro was often left covered in bruises while her other son locked himself in his room terrorized, and her husband spent as much time as he could at work. Her friends abandoned her, frightened to bring their kids around George.

"Take him back, mom, take him back," her son, Joey, would cry. But that was not an option for Nancy. She struggled to find placement because even the best group homes could not deal with the rages and couldn't expose their employees to George's level of violence.

Nancy quickly learned that putting away a child in such severe distress is far from simple. As George grew bigger and the punches and kicks got harder over the years, Ferraro had become battered and bruised physically, emotionally and psychologically. She was so climatized by the constant abuse that it became a part of her.

THE WOMAN WHO LIVED TO TELL THE TALE

Make no mistake, this memoir is not about how a mother's love triumphed and healed the hopeless. The message that "love heals all" and "if we loved harder, we too could fix the broken things in our life" is not what this memoir is about. Ferraro turns that romantic idea on its head. Some broken things cannot be healed.

In the end, Nancy was forced to carve her own path, with or without the people who loved her the most. She tried to do everything in her power to help a child that might never have the capacity to care, understand, or ever feel his mother's love.

As a reader, I could see a woman consumed by determination and dedication to George. Nancy says, "I'm not a victim and I'm not a hero. I'm just a mom who got plunged into a nightmare and lived to tell the tale." The strength and quality of character that Nancy possesses is what will keep you reading, just as it kept me reading.

I could not put When the Bough Breaks down, which is rare for me as a reader. I was propelled forward into Nancy's world where few would dare to tread. I realized that while my problems are cyclical and have a beginning, a middle and an end, Ferraro might never be free of hers. She says in the memoir that her faith in God continues to give her the strength to face the next part of her journey.

Through the darkness, God led Ferraro to make the decision that would be best for her and for George. What broke my heart is that in this lifetime, George will never be able to reflect on what his mother did for him and how she stood by him when no one else would. In her next life, Nancy Ferraro will be very well taken care of.

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