

Book Review

Car boot diamond

Goddard D. (2019). **Car boot diamond**. London: Austin Macauley Publishers. £5.59

Reviewed by Professor Chris Goddard, Adjunct Research Professor, Division of Arts, Education and Social Services, University of South Australia, Australia, and Visiting Professor in Social Work, University of Hertfordshire, UK.

Chris Goddard (with Neerosh Mudaly) is the author of *The Truth is Longer than a Lie* in which young victims talk about being abused and the effect the abuse has on their lives.

My first memory of being interested in coincidences is from secondary school. It was William Shakespeare's life, and death, rather than his plays, that grabbed my attention. I was amazed to learn from our English teacher that William Shakespeare was born on April 23rd, 1564 and died on April 23rd, 1616. In fact, as I recall, the teacher told us that in 16th century England the exact date of birth was not recorded. April 23rd was assumed to be the birthdate as Shakespeare was baptised on 26th April. I was less concerned that he died so young – by today's standards – than by that extraordinary coincidence: Shakespeare was born and died on the same date, in the same place, Stratford-upon-Avon.

This review would not have been written if it were not for another extraordinary coincidence. And the journey to the extraordinary coincidence started with another smaller coincidence.

Boarding the plane from Melbourne to London I showed my boarding pass to the steward. He looked at it and said, 'Another Goddard' and pointed to another member of the cabin crew. 'We will have a Goddard looking after a Goddard,' he said.

The flight was uneventful, but the service was excellent. Goddard is not an uncommon name, but this was the first unrelated Goddard I had met for many years. I landed in London in the very early hours and had to wander around until my hotel room was ready.

On my way back to the hotel, I went into a large newsagent and bookstore and bought a copy of *The Guardian*. As I was leaving a woman came up to me and said, 'Excuse me.' She pointed to a display of books that, in my jet-lagged state, I had not noticed. She held out a copy of a book. 'I wondered if you might be interested,' she said.

I looked at the book she held out and I must have appeared shocked. 'Is there something the matter?' she asked. I replied that there was nothing wrong but that, by coincidence, my name was also Goddard. I turned the book over and read the back cover. I was even more shocked. 'Debra,' I said, 'Another coincidence. I see you were in care and this is your story. I have worked in child welfare practice and research for many years.' It was Debra's turn to look shocked.

I bought a copy of the book. Debra Goddard signed it for me and gave me her email address.

I promised to read it. And read it I have.

Debra Goddard's life was one of turmoil. Her mother became pregnant with Debra when she was just 16 years of age and, just 18 months later, gave birth to another girl. Soon afterwards, their father left mum. Debra went to live with her grandmother in a house that was known as the 'local party house' because it was the house 'that everyone went back to after the pub had closed, to continue drinking' (Goddard, 2019, p. 16).

Debra Goddard describes her early feelings of 'deep anger and hurt' (Goddard, 2019 p. 15) after one of the girls at school told her that the girls had been told not to associate with Debra because Debra's mother was a 'slag' (p. 16).

This is my first memory of feeling deep anger and hurt, knowing I wasn't the same as everyone else. For over 45 years, this feeling never left me. The girl told me what I already knew, but I couldn't stop myself from lashing out. I was so out of control . . . That I even attacked the teachers who tried to stop me (Goddard, 2019, p. 16–17)

Debra describes how isolated she became, never invited to birthday parties:

My home-life consisted of violence and promiscuous behaviour. I felt scared and alone but did not have a single true friend in the world. (p. 17)

Debra's mother married again:

Their marriage never stood a chance with me. I was constantly stealing from them, shoplifting and fighting with anyone I could get my hands on, even boys. (p. 19)

Debra's story is a painful account of intimate partner violence, children's homes, foster care, police, social workers, truant centres and detention centres. There are important insights into her own behaviour: 'I didn't mean to be difficult, I was just scared . . .'

In spite of her own troubles, she recognised the trauma and abuse suffered by others. She met a 13-year-old girl with a disabled mother, wheelchair bound, and confined to the ground floor of her house:

She told us that every night her dad would summon her upstairs and abuse her . . . She was going back home, and when I asked why, she said she would rather put up with the abuse than not be with her disabled mum. (p. 27)

Reunited with her mother, Debra tries to help her. Her mother has been exploited, lost her home and has major debts. As they try to rebuild their lives, they go through their remaining possessions, including things bought at car boot sales years before:

An old jewellery box that I had for a long time, fell on the floor. A ring with a large stone, that I bought from the car boot sale three decades ago, fell out and caught the light. (p. 92)

The ring was dirty and rusty, but the stone sparkled. She took it to the local jeweller who 'nearly fainted' when he saw the ring (p. 92). The jeweller said that he could not value the ring but that it was 'worth a fortune' (p. 93). Sotheby's took the car boot diamond on a world tour and it eventually sold for more than half a million pounds.

Debra Goddard provides a brutally honest account of her life and the understandable anger that filled it. Her honesty is rewarded by the jeweller's act of extraordinary honesty. Once again, her life is turned upside down, but this is a turn for the better.

The book is not beautifully written. In fact, there are one or two typographical errors, and Shakespeare has nothing to fear. It is, however, a story that needed to be told and Debra Goddard is to be applauded for her honesty. Very few victims of violence in families have the courage or opportunity to tell their stories.

Too many remain silent or are silenced. This book will provide excellent insights for students in the helping professions. A wonderful coincidence.

Reference

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