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Three Little Words: A Memoir



Synopsis

"Sunshine, you're my baby and I'm your only mother. You must mind the one taking care of you, but she's not your mama." Ashley Rhodes-Courter spent nine years of her life in fourteen different foster homes, living by those words. As her mother spirals out of control, Ashley is left clinging to an unpredictable, dissolving relationship, all the while getting pulled deeper and deeper into the foster care system. Painful memories of being taken away from her home quickly become consumed by real-life horrors, where Ashley is juggled between caseworkers, shuffled from school to school, and forced to endure manipulative, humiliating treatment from a very abusive foster family. In this inspiring, unforgettable memoir, Ashley finds the courage to succeed - and in doing so, discovers the power of her own voice.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Yesterday, my laundry hamper was full to overflowing demanding attention as I opened this book. I had seen the author on Good Morning America, and this seemed like an interesting story. As I started to read thoughts of laundry disappeared, as I was riveted by this compelling story, of a little girl who just wanted to be loved by her mother, or a family. I could not put this book down until I finished. It was like I was there looking on as she went through these various ordeals/ adventures. If you are considering adopting or fostering a child, this book is a must. As you read, you will understand what these children have to go through. That understanding brings compassion. You will also understand what would be parents go through because both sides of the story are told effectively. If you work in childcare services, this ought to be required reading. If you are like me, this

is an inspiring story about surviving and succeeding against the odds. You may notice this story has a mythical quality, reminiscent of other stories like *Oliver Twist*, a Roald Dahl story, or even *Anne of Green Gables* or *Harry Potter* which the author refers to, except this is for real. It is shocking to me how a system which is designed to protect children, can fail so miserably at times. How is it possible for a home that is only licensed to have two children end up with 10. How come foster children end up living in a trailer? The children do not have a voice that is heard. I particularly commend Gay Courter her adoptive mother who also persisted against the odds, where some adoptive parents would have given up. She ended up with a remarkable child who has written a remarkable book, who I feel sure will continue to be a voice for foster children, and orphans. Hope this was useful.

Although I generally like memoirs, too often I get bogged down in boring minutiae of dysfunctional families. This one was different. I was surprised to find I couldn't put it down. Rhodes-Courter can write. She vividly describes her years in foster care, being totally honest about herself and the families who were paid to care for her. Mercifully, she knows just how far to go before reader fatigue sets in, and she knows exactly where to stop to leave us disturbed but not overwhelmed. Anyone who read the author's New York Times piece knows the happy ending: Rhodes-Courter was adopted by a loving family that was uniquely qualified to appreciate her gifts and help her grow as a writer and speaker. As a bonus, she gained two older brothers (they look like teddy bear types) and a houseful of cats. But we're made to realize there was no fairy tale magic. Ashley Rhodes arrived in the Courter family as a scared, suspicious kid. She didn't know how to hug and she was a picky eater who would drive most people mad. She tested her family over and over again. Gradually, she became a real family member. Her new brothers teased her when she avoided helping with the dishes ("Hey, are you a guest?") Her mother went along with the food fuss. Her dad was, well, a dad. And she admits she came to realize just how lucky she was. In what may be the most powerful part of the book, Rhodes-Courter asks a very good question. Why do states pay a fortune for foster care instead of subsidizing the birth parents? What would have happened if her own mother had been given money and support to keep her own children? And why does the state ignore reports of abuse in a foster home yet whisk children away from their own parents at the slightest hint of a problem? Just stay away from this book if you're on deadline. It sucks you in.

Ashley Rhodes-Courter's memoir is must reading for anyone who cares about children and their welfare. This brave young woman's account of the long road she traveled after being forcibly removed from her birth mother's care to eventually finding security with a family who nurtures her in

ways she never could have imagined is a heartbreaker. While the often terrifying journey ends well for Ashley, we know there are thousands more "lost" children out there who will never be as smart, as determined--or as lucky. Now twenty-two and a successful crusader for those caught in the foster-care system as she was--almost interminably--Ashley Rhodes-Courter stands as witness that there has to be a better way to deal with the children left behind when "the state" decides their parents are unfit. *Three Little Words* (they are not the ones you think) is an incredibly well-written tale, all the more powerful for the fact that every word is true.

Three Little Words is an honest and powerful memoir which shares the painful details of Ashley Rhodes-Courter's nine year journey through the foster care system, while it also conveys a message of inner strength and hope. I applaud Ashley for bravely sharing her story and commend this young woman for her on-going efforts to help the children in the foster care system.-Suzanne Buckingham Slade, author of *Adopted: The Ultimate Teen Guide*

This is an absolutely incredible book. I cried at times remembering my own experience as a DFCS case worker whose hands were often tied by rules and court orders that made little sense to me. I could only imagine what it did to the children I worked with. I like to think that I was one of the good ones, caring about my kids and doing my best to protect them and represent their needs in court. I hope I was. What an amazing story of intelligence and resilience in Ashley. I hope and pray that all continues to well with her and her brother.

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