

# Book Review

*The Kindness of Strangers*

by Katrina Kittle

978-06-056474-2 (hardcover)

New York: William Morrow (of Harper Collins Publishers)

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Reviewed by Geraldine S. Pearson, PhD, APRN

*The Kindness of Strangers* takes place in a suburban community outside of Dayton, Ohio. Stable professional families tend to live in this idyllic Midwestern setting. The book begins by describing Sarah Laden, a young widow and mother of two sons, Danny and Nate, who runs a catering business. She is close friends with Courtney Kendrick, a local physician. Courtney is married to a businessman and has a young son, Jordan, a fifth grader at the beginning of the book.

When Jordan attempts suicide and Sarah finds him before he dies, it is revealed, from a tape in his book bag, that he has been the victim of a child pornography ring. It is even more horrifying when it comes to light that Courtney and her husband have orchestrated this with their young son and with other children over a period of several years. Both parents are charged and incarcerated and Jordan is left without a family.

The novel describes the events leading to Sarah's decision to become a foster parent for Jordan. It details the experience of a severely traumatized latency aged child, permanently removed from his parents' care, and also describes Danny and Nate and their reactions to Sarah's decision to care for Jordan. At its heart the book details a community's disbelief and horror when confronted with the reality of the abusiveness of one of its most prominent families.

Valente (2005) noted that sexual abuse in childhood leaves a psychological trauma that compromises trust, can disable self-esteem, erode self-concept, and negatively influence relationships and the ability to trust. She notes that boys, in particular, struggle with revealing sexual abuse. This novel examines this issue and allows the reader to view the world from Jordan's perspective of defense and denial. Jordan experiences many of the psychological phenomena described by

Valente, including chronic somatic complaints, anger, passivity, poor school performance, difficult peer relationships, and ultimately, a suicide attempt with potentially lethal consequences. Similarly, Lemmey and Tice (2000) question the persistence and pervasiveness of pornography and prostitution, and speculate that communities tend to overlook these phenomena. This novel certainly illustrates that point.

*The Kindness of Strangers* was written by an author who has some experience with abused children and adolescents. Katrina Kittle does a superb job of helping the reader understand the "ripple effect" of child sexual abuse, on the individual, the family, and the community. This book has particular relevance for nurses who have key roles in screening, assessing, and treating children who have been sexually abused. For psychiatric nurses just beginning their work with children and adolescents, the novel offers a fascinating developmental perspective about Jordan and Danny, who are fifth graders, and about Nate, in high school.

This well-written, realistic novel casts a positive light on mental health providers, who are mentioned as resources for this family. More importantly, it offers a glimpse into one community, one family, and most importantly, one child, victimized by a child pornography ring.

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## References

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