



The Cracker Factory

Joyce Rebeta-Burditt

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Meet Cassie Barrett. Typical housewife of the 1960's...three children, a husband she isn't sure she loves, a lover she is sure she doesn't, a psychiatrist she wants to murder, a major drinking problem, and one of the fastest, funniest, wise-cracking mouths of the time.

The Cracker Factory Details

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From Reader Review The Cracker Factory for online ebook

Morgan Hundley says

My mom gave me this book when I was 16, it was one of her favorites, now it's one of mine! 20 yrs later we still talk about this book. It's one, if not the funniest books I've read. It made me laugh out loud and still does everytime I read it. Maybe it's because we come from a slightly dysfunctional family, so we can relate, but both my mom and I love this book!

Stephanie says

Loved, loved, loved this book! It was so perfect for a rainy day on the ocean in Truro. I couldn't put it down. I don't know anything about the author, she must have addiction and psychiatric issues to write so knowingly of the experiences Cassie goes through. I am so glad to have found this book through friends here on goodreads. There were some revelations Cassie had, that made me say, "oh yeah, I know what that's like".

Nicole says

Upon reading about the author, I learned that The Cracker Factory is somewhat based on Joyce Rebeta-Burditt's life. While I commend her for her bravery in sharing that difficult story, there were just several patches throughout the novel where I was a little disinterested and wanted to skip ahead. Very sharp dialogue from the protagonist Cassie.

Laurie Stoll says

The Cracker Factory is what the character's call a mental health ward. The stab at humor fall's quite short. After about 100 pages I skipped to the back of the book and read the last few pages. This is something I never do but felt like I didn't miss much by doing this.

Melissa Lee-Tammeus says

A dear friend told me years ago to read this book - that I would really like it. I ordered in from Amazon for \$1.00 - it was written in 1977. It took me a few years to actually pull it off the shelf and I am so glad I finally did. Although it is from the 70's, the subject stands the test of time. A mother on the brink of destruction finds herself in a psychiatric ward - the whole story is her growth in the unit, and how she comes to terms with her alcoholism and the "craziness" of being in the ward. Being on the other side in real life, I loved looking at it from a patient's angle - this is a great rendition of how it truly goes down. Not as heavy as One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and not as bleak as Girl, Interrupted, but it is an honest portrayal of trying to get through the day without losing your mind, despite every opportunity to do otherwise.

Julie Boggie says

I have read this book several times over the years, I'm not sure why, but it's a comfort read for me.

LaurieH118 says

Written in the late 1970s, this book about an alcoholic housewife's stay in a sanitarium ("The Cracker Factory" of the title) is very dated. First of all, everyone smokes. Patients, doctors, everybody! I was a little concerned about the hospital giving possibly suicidal patients matches, but beyond that, I couldn't get past how awful that hospital must have smelled! And then there was the "you're like OJ Simpson" reference, which at the time meant graceful and efficient.

Still, I enjoyed the book. It was funny and very compassionate toward its characters, even the ones it was hard to like at times. I became rather fond of our heroine, Cassie, because while she was clever and very funny, she was also very flawed and in some ways quite ordinary, which made her easy to relate to.

Kim Fay says

If you loved (and related to) "Norma Jean the Termite Queen," you'll love this book too. Same era (the 1970s); same situation (depressed suburban housewife). Otherwise, this autobiographical novel about Cassie, her drinking problem, her opaque psychiatrist, her irritating husband, and the friends she makes during her stay at a Cleveland rehab sort-of hospital digresses significantly from the typical "finding yourself" fiction of the time.

Cassie's husband can't understand why she isn't happy with her nice house and kids. Her priest blames her depression on the use of birth control. Cassie drinks to the point of endangering her children; the fights she has with her husband when she's drunk are brutal. (And she isn't all that nice sober.) Yet when she reaches the conclusion (by way of AA) that she's an alcoholic, her husband viciously resists the idea, and her mother condemns her for her self-indulgence. It's nearly impossible for her to attempt to recover when those around her are so in denial, they insist there's nothing for her to recover from.

While the story (its themes, or whatever you want to call it) are heavy enough to sink an ocean liner, Rebeta-Burditt writes with the kind of razor-sharp sense of humor essential to keep Cassie afloat, and to keep the reader above water (most of the time).

Megan says

Underneath the dated rants, the thinly veiled misogyny, casual racism, and unbelievable treatment of mental health patients.. this was a rather decent book. Twenty-eight year old Cassie, during her second stay on her local hospital's mental health ward, is finally coming to terms with the fact that she is an alcoholic. In the beginning, we see Cassie as an immature, self-absorbed, depressed and passive aggressive woman. At one point she is discussing her disillusion with her marriage with her psychiatrist, Dr. Edwin Alexander.

"You have choices, Casie. You can go home, reconcile, see a marriage counselor--"

"You?" I interrupted.

"No," he said, without explanation; then continued, "you can do any of those things, or you can decide on a separation, divorce, whatever. You have choices."

Outside of cholera, I can think of anything I want less than choices, Edwin. Tell me what to do. Please. I'll do whatever you say, but it better turn out well or I'll blame you forever, "Do I have to decide now?" I asked, beginning to panic.

This novel is described as being laugh out loud funny, but I found Cassie to be incredibly unlikable in the beginning. However, as the novel progresses, we actually see her mature, get well and change for the better. This passé, forgotten novel from 1977 is an excellent example of "show don't tell" and presents one woman's fairly believable struggle with alcoholism.

But, man.. the way things were done back then. Alcoholic Cassie is thrown in with people who have a plethora of different mental illnesses. People *smoke cigarettes* in the hospital.. Cassie's shrink even bums cigarettes from her during their therapy sessions! And in true psychiatrist fashion, the fabulous Dr. Alexander answers each of Cassie's questions with a question of his own (the better to teach her how to solve her own problems, right?) Except when the discussion is focused on Cassie's lover. Then Dr. Alexander has no problem telling - no, *ordering* Cassie to leave her lover. During a session with the Dr. Alexander, Cassie admits she met her lover that afternoon,

"Where did you go today?" he asked softly.

I ground out my cigarette. "I went downtown to see Tom Donnerly."

The chair whirled around and both his hands came crashing down on the desk. "You what?" He thundered.

Sheesh.. I thought psychiatrists were supposed to be non-judgmental?

Parts of this book definitely were longer than they needed to be. Long rants in which Cassie talks about finding herself, and her need to fill a void that hasn't been met thus far by her role of wife and mother. I have a feeling that a lot of these passages were more poignant to the women of the 1970's who had much less choices and freedom than women do today. Nonetheless, this was an interesting look at the lives women used to lead, their role in society, the restrictions and burdens placed upon them.

Linda says

I found this in a used paperback book store in Guilford, CT about 5 years ago and never got around to it, for whatever reason. Absolutely hilarious!! It's rare that a book makes me laugh out loud, even ones that are rated as such. The subject matter may not be everyone's cup of tea - an alcoholic locked up in a looney bin - but I found it one of the funniest things I've ever read. I also loved the writing style of the author.

Sonia says

This is the funniest/serious book I have ever read. It deals with serious subject matter, an alcoholic wife in a suburban Cleveland home, but the alcoholic herself is witty and her psychiatrist nick names her "The Fastest Mouth in Cleveland". Natalie Wood bought the screen rights to this book and made a TV movie here in Cleveland. Read this - it's a page turner.

Ronnie says

This started off to be rather funny, then it turned serious. A look at alcoholics that were institutionalized for their drinking. One woman's take on how her view of her own life pushed her into a bottle, and how she pulled herself out of it. It was a good read, but it a long one (very small type and lots of pages! lol).

Keegan says

I purchased this book while walking past the Ogunquit Library along the Marginal Way, last summer. The library was having a book sale and I picked up this very weathered looking book for a dollar or two. I have finally settled into reading it and I have laughed out loud countless times in just the first few chapters. Looking forward to the rest :)

Charles says

[was hoping that she really would make changes to her life. Instead, the book made it seem that unhappiness with a stultifying life is a symptom rather than a rea

Turnip says

Joyce Rebeta-Burditt's 'The Cracker Factory' is the story of a late 1970s housewife who winds up in a mental health treatment facility because of her alcoholism. It's semi-autobiographical and peppered with some hilarious turns of phrase that keep the story itself grounded without glamourising alcoholism or institutionalisation.

I've read a lot of books about mental health and substance abuse in the last few years, and I feel like this is something like what would happen if Jenny Valentish dropped all of the science in 'A Woman of Substances' and wrote 'Girl, Interrupted' about her rehabilitation instead. It's dark and reflective and incredibly funny.

While the content of 'The Cracker Factory' might be a little dated (the traditional housewife is a stereotype has been eroded somewhat by the last three decades), I believe that the sentiments are extremely relevant for any woman today struggling with a work/life/sanity balance. My only real criticism is that I think the ending winds up being a little glib and neat (if we were going to write about becoming better people, wouldn't you want to put a bow on it and make it look perfect?). But to anyone trying to get a handle on where they stand in the world, especially if it feels like everyone else is the problem as well, I think 'The Cracker Factory' is an excellent read.

Cee says

I know I've experienced an excellent story by the heartbreak I feel when I finish a book, like I've just said

goodbye to a close friend. This novel is wonderful, nostalgic, achingly beautiful, and hilarious. I laughed out loud, cried out loud, and found myself talking out loud to the protagonist, Cassie, like a loon. Her struggles are real and relatable, her pain is visceral. Joyce Rebeta-Burditt created such different and unique characters, and each one was as important to the plot as the last. Critics have compared her novel with "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest", and though it is primarily set in a psychiatric ward with lovable committed, it is wholly separate and brings a totally different feeling of healing, and hope. There's no other novel like this. It quickly became one of my favorites.

Brian says

I think it was 7th or 8th grade, 8th probably, that I read this book after finding it in a box in my mother's basement. It sounded funny from the dust jacket, and I picked it up and figured, well, since I'm reading it, I might as well use it for an outside-reading assignment currently underway in English class. I'd love to know what my teacher thought about me after reading my journal. It'd probably explain a lot.

The plot is simple enough to grasp; a woman, Cassie, is an alcoholic, and between her bratty kids, an abusive husband, a disconnected lover, and an utterly unsympathetic mother, has been driven to depression and currently resides in an otherwise benign mental hospital. The story chronicles her sessions with a disingenuous shrink, a manic-depressive (we'd say bi-polar these days) friend also in the psych ward, and various friendly nurses who sometimes help Cassie make it through the day. Topics are dark and sometimes very real in the uncomfortable sort of way that I imagine makes book editors worry and publishers dive for that bottle hidden in the bottom of their desks. Yes it's dark, cruel, and harsh the world that Burditt portrays, but so is the one we live in.

The only nod my teacher ever gave me was that the book "sounded familiar." I suspect it was a rather popular fixture in women's lib in the late 70s, but in asking my mother why she bought it, she can't remember. I do know that it was riotously funny the first time I read it, and nearly as good with each successive reading. In fact, I've just bought a copy on Amazon so I might read it again. It's been out of print for twenty-two years, and it's not to be found in a library, so if you want to read it, I have two suggestions.

1. get a good friend and have a chat
2. go online.

I'm giving it five stars. It might not live up to them, but it has a fond place in my memory and I crib lines from it often.

Kyrie says

I really like this book, but I don't usually recommend it. The main character's quirks appeal to me, but I'm not sure anyone else would like this tale of madness and alcoholism and how she gets through it. It also reads a bit like an ad for AA.

SusanCope says

This is an old favorite about a wife and mother in Cleveland, Ohio who struggles with a drinking problem.

The dialogue is very witty and interesting, despite the tough material. I suspect a happy ending, as struggling heroine comes to some major epiphanies in regard to the people in her life.

Crystal says

will be one of my most memorable reads. i laughed out loud throughout and also felt a bit connected to the main character. wonderful!
