



Loud in the House of Myself: Memoir of a Strange Girl

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"An utterly unique journey down some of the mind's more mysterious byways . . . ranges from the shocking to the simply lovely." —Marya Hornbacher

Stacy Pershall grew up depressed and too smart for her own good, a deeply strange girl in Prairie Grove, Arkansas (population 1,000), where the prevailing wisdom was that Jesus healed all. From her days as a thirteen-year-old Jesus freak, through a battle with anorexia and bulimia, her first manic episode at eighteen, and the eventual diagnosis of bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder, this spirited and at times mordantly funny memoir chronicles Pershall's journey through hell—several breakdowns and suicide attempts—and her struggle with the mental health care system.

After her 2001 suicide attempt, broadcast live on a Webcam, Pershall realized the need to heal her mind and body. She found a revolutionary cure (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) and a new mood-stabilizing medication. She also met a tattoo artist and discovered the healing power of body modification. By giving over her skin and enduring the physical pain, she learned about the true nature of trust.

Loud in the House of Myself: Memoir of a Strange Girl Details

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From Reader Review Loud in the House of Myself: Memoir of a Strange Girl for online ebook

Kate says

Thank you Stacy for writing such a poetic, wonderful, hearbreakingly truthful memoir about mental illness. It's something that doesn't get talked about enough.

Liralen says

When I checked this out at the library, the librarian scanning my books perked up. "Oh, I read this one," she said. (This conversation, by the way, was odd in and of itself; the librarians all recognise me but rarely comment on my reading choices.)

"Was it good?" I asked.

She made a face. "It was...well, she's really kind of crazy," she said.

That was, of course, precisely the reason that I was reading this book in the first place, but I didn't say that. In any case, the librarian was pretty much correct -- the book is all about the author being really kind of crazy.

It's hard to rate. In some ways I think the book is very well done, but in other ways I think that she is a bit too single-minded. It's kind of like -- "I was crazy, and then I was crazier, and then I was *really* crazy, and then they called me this kind of crazy but I was actually that kind of crazy, and then I solved my craziness by getting tattoos." I'm exaggerating, of course, but not by all that much.

Actually, the tattoo part of things could have been really interesting had she gone into more depth. It sounds like, for her, it was a combination of socially sanctioned (kind of) self-injury and a desire to make memories and feelings permanent. For all the meaning she tries to attribute to her tattoos, though, it's not all that clear what they mean to her in the now, whether it's the process of being tattooed that matters or the tattoos themselves. I wanted to know more (which tends to be a good sign, as far as I'm concerned).

There's a focus on mania, I think. I don't know a whole lot about most of the things with which she was diagnosed, but as far as I could tell she largely brushed over the less dramatic bits to focus on the, well, crazy bits. (Unhealthy on-off relationship? Plenty of page space. Guy she married? Not important.) It's easy to understand why, but at the same time I wonder whether that undermines part of the message.

Ian says

A worthy read and a genre I find interesting.

To read the synopsis you might be tempted to think 'oh another young adult autobiography of how I overcame my troubled youth and my experiences in hospital and what it was like on medication blah blah blah' but lets not generalise too much on these kind of books as each one is a unique journey for a unique

person and I really admire somebody who can share such personal experiences with strangers.

Being involved in child and young adult counselling in the past one area I have always struggled to fully understand and so preventing a truly empathic understanding is eating disorders. Stacy has written quite a lot about this in her book and the way she described what was happening for her was a real light bulb moment for me. Stacy describes her experience of anorexia and bulimia in such an easy and understandable way to the point that I felt personally connected, willing her to get through it, to find the strength, to find a way to cope that works for her.

Stacey shares her experiences using both humour and sadness and I really like her writing style.

I definitely recommend it to others who are interested in the genre and also as a general read to put our own lives into perspective.

Cari says

Loud in the House of Myself didn't click with me, didn't ring quite true. There's a focus on shock value here; the book is basically a laundry list of the most awful scenes from her life. Normally I wouldn't fault Pershall for that, considering the genre and the mental health issues involved, but she uses the book like a spotlight on her very worst moments, illuminating them in a way that seems like she's perversely proud of them, and uses only a couple pages at the end to skim over the recovery process. And by "process" I mean she gives a basic outline of drug and DBT therapy but little on her experience going through it, aside from complaining about side effects. She states she's only been recovering for the last couple years, which makes me think she's not recovered much at all. She's stabilized, and there's a difference. (It's the same vibe I got from Hornbacher's Wasted, and the crash and burn her life took after that proved she wasn't recovered nearly enough at that time to be writing a book based on her experiences.)

In short, I think the focus of the book was skewed toward shock value and that the author may not be recovered to the point of being ready to write this. I wish Pershall had waited a few more years before sitting down at the computer. She's a good writer, and I think Loud in the House of Myself would've strongly benefited from additional brewing time. Pershall wasn't ready, so the book wasn't ready.

David - proud Gleeman in Branwen's adventuring party says

Review to come

Mariah Roze says

I read this book for the goodreads book club Diversity in All Forms! If you would like to participate in our discussions here is the link:

<https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/...>

I really enjoyed this book. As a special education teacher that deals with a large majority of students with mental health issues, this book was absolutely fascinating to me. I not only learned more about bulimia and anorexia, but also about borderline personality disorder and bipolar. The author did a great job at sharing her

story, and I love reading autobiographies. This book was well written and covered a large majority of her life. Even the epilogue was fascinating.

I found it very interesting too that she loves tattoos, so she made that a big part of her book all the way through.

She became obsessed with things and people and I found this part of the book really fascinating....
"There's nothing quite like being manic and sliding into obsession and then realizing the people you're obsessed with are obsessed with you too. It's a strange inverse psychosis, like seeing your reflection thrown back at you in a thousand mirrors, going on forever, and it wreaks havoc on successful splitting..."

I suggest this book :)

Rachel says

Excerpt:

"It is embarrassing to admit that I didn't begin [healing] until the age of thirty-four, when after a breakdown I began to get my life together through medication, therapy, and tattooing. Borderline means you're one of those girls who walk around wearing long sleeves in the summer because you've carved up your forearms over your boyfriend. You make pathetic suicidal gestures and write bad poetry about them, listen to Ani DiFranco albums on endless repeat, end up in the emergency room for overdoses, scare off boyfriends by insisting they tell you they love you five hundred times a day and hacking into their email to make sure they're not lying, have a police record for shoplifting, and your tooth enamel is eroded from purging. You've had five addresses and eight jobs in three years, your friends are avoiding your phone calls, you're questioning your sexuality, and the credit card companies are after you. It took a lot of years to admit that I was exactly that girl, and that the diagnostic criteria for the disorder were essentially an outline of my life:

[Borderline Personality Disorder is characterized by] a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affect, and marked impulsivity beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

1. Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment. Note: Do not include suicidal or self-mutilating behavior covered in criterion 5.
2. A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation
3. Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self
4. Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating). Note: Do not include suicidal or self-mutilating behavior covered in criterion 5.
5. Recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behavior
6. Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days)

7. Chronic feelings of emptiness

8. Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights)

9. Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms.

The first time I read these criteria, I felt like someone had been following me around taking notes.”(Loud in the House of Myself, pg. 8-10)

Even reading it for the second time, this memoir still hits very close to home for me. Having also grown up dealing with borderline personality disorder and having battled through manic episodes and deep depressive states, as well as my own forms of self-destruction, reading Pershall’s story felt almost like connecting with a kindred spirit. After just the first twenty pages of her book, I was laughing and sobbing simultaneously— unsure of exactly how to feel aside from an overwhelming sense of rapport, and the relief that comes from knowing that someone, somewhere, has been where you are, felt how you feel— and has survived it. I found solace in her story; although it's different in many ways from my own, there were times while reading where I felt that if I were to walk up to her and tell her a story from my life, she would know exactly what I was talking about. Her memoir is deeply affecting; you don't need to have lived through something similar to recognize her courage and applaud the strength inherent in her words.

didaink says

Rarely do I land upon a book that changes me as a mother... but, then came Loud in the House of Myself aka LITHOM.

As a mother of a girl who is already struggling with body image at age eight, who is also intensely emotional and creative, I found that it was initially excruciating to read the details of what this young girl experienced. Stacy as a child was just too familiar. I had to stop reading for a while because it was too painful to idly sit and watch this tormented young girl unravel under the watch of her Arkansan family in a town the size of a Wal-Mart Supercenter. Besides, the way I stumbled upon Stacy Pershall and her memoir was fortuitous. I went to Barnes & Noble in Little Rock that afternoon to buy only David Sedaris’ latest book and walked out holding a copy of LITHOM with “Strange Girl Army!” inscribed in pink ink, the author’s infectious smile and mural of colorful tattoos indelibly part of my experience in the South.

Here was my other problem but the reason I picked it back up: I loved the way Stacy wrote, her ability to paint the painful details of her childhood with such an honest, almost comical, stroke that I couldn’t stop caring about this little girl and how much she loved her mother and father. I fell in love with her one-of-a-kind quirks (the love for Hot Wheels instead of dolls, how she wanted to be Schroeder from Peanuts with a lit candle on her tiny toy piano, her love for Sugar Daddies, my all-time favorite candy from the 70s).

She was smart and full of what I call “the sillies,” doing things her own unique way as a child, writing stories that showed her creativity, and in the beginning her mother accepted all of it... all of her eccentricities. She probably even celebrated them and laughed a little too loud about them like most every mother does who thinks her child is the cutest kid in the room.

But, as I continued to read, I grew angry with her mother, her father too, for their negligence in accepting their beautiful, artistic, tormented daughter as she got older, for ignoring what they, no doubt, had observed

all along, for never even going along for moral support when she got a tattoo that held meaning for her when she reached adulthood -- just to hold her hand, if nothing else, even if they didn't agree with it.

Then, it hit me. They had absolutely no tools by which to reach her. It was as if she had fallen into a well, calling out for her parents, but they didn't have the right kind of flashlight to see her or the right rope ladder to pull her out, and she and they kept slipping off the rungs back into the dark.

There were no books like *LITHOM* in their world, or for that matter, on any bookshelf in the South, let alone Prairie Grove, Arkansas. There was no Amazon, no Goodreads... and even the almighty Oprah, who Stacy's mother might have turned to at the time on the topic of eating disorders, was of no help either, Oprah herself obsessed with diets and fitting into her "skinny" jeans as American women cheered her on.

This book has changed me for the better, but I resisted it at first... because I was scared – scared to look too closely at things a mother doesn't want to really see or confront. Had Stacy's writing not been so rhythmic, so intelligent, so genuine, I would have stopped and gone back to reading David Sedaris for kicks after carpool, math homework and dirty dishes.

I now encourage mothers to read this book to better understand our girls and boys, to understand mental illness and our healthcare system better. We, their parents, need to seek out memoirs like Stacy's and educate ourselves about things that are too painful most days to contemplate. When it's too painful and we want to look away, that's how we know that we need to keep reading. This is how we learn what type of ladder or flashlight we should have in our parenting tool shed. We may slip and fall until we find the right one, but then we just make another trip back to Home Depot or the closest Wal-Mart Supercenter.

Chris Blocker says

Ten years ago I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. Since then, I have often been in and out of therapy. I've tried various techniques to regulate my moods. What worked best for me, however, were words. Words are important to me, and by reading and learning about BPD, I was able to articulate my feelings.

I've read many books on the subject, probably all of which were written by therapists. Some I stepped back in amazement from, asking how they knew so much about me. Others were clearly speculating how a Borderline feels and reacts, and were way off. I was excited to read *Loud in the House of Myself* because here was a book actually written by a Borderline. And, not surprisingly, Stacy Pershall knows my story.

Okay, so Pershall's life has been more extreme than mine. Compared to her, I'm a tame Borderline--my therapists always said I was "high functioning." But the base of her actions and feelings are nearly identical. If you want insight into what it means to have BPD, this is the book.

On top of her BPD, Pershall struggled with eating disorders. Though I have many extremist behaviors that mirror the author's bulimia and anorexia, I have never had an eating disorder, per se. Though I'm not as versed in this field, Pershall's descriptions were vivid and made this side of her illness extremely real for me.

When I first started this book, my one worry was that--given the marketing of the book and its target audience (largely, young girls it seems)--that *Loud in the House of Myself* would be juvenile and poorly written. Quickly, this fear receded. Pershall is intelligent and witty. She talks often about her love of literature and her reading list is impressive.

Loud in the House of Myself is a frightening book. It's scary to get in the head of someone who is often irrational, someone who is seemingly normal one moment, belligerent the next, someone who swings from a belief that they are divine to a knowledge that they are worse than nothing. It's scary, but it's what it means to be Borderline. For whatever it is worth, I attest for Pershall's accuracy on the subject. *Loud in the House of Myself* is largely what it means to have been diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder.

Pam says

There's a particular quote that I like while reading this book. Its on page 90.
"Never forget the place you left, and when you return, tell stories of other lands."

Lisa says

Very unsatisfying. This book has many flaws and they make it hard to read and relate. I wish she could have reflected on the cause and effect factor, because she only lists what happened as facts and not really describe how she felt about the situation or how it may have changed her. She describes DBT as what saved her, but she never went into detail regarding the emotional process she went through. I think she took advantage of being crazy and used it as a crutch for life. I wanted to like her, but too many things

Eve Vulgaris says

I don't need to write my autobiography. I just read it. Sure, there are some differences from my own story, but it hits so close as to be chilling. I, like the author, found my way via tattoos and DBT. I'm not sure how someone without at least one of the diagnoses would see the book as what makes the book good are the moments I found myself reading exactly what I would do, how I would react, seeing myself outside myself. This isn't intentionally vague, it's just one of those books you either "get" or "don't get." All the reviewers complaining that the emotional content is lacking really don't understand that you can't describe the emotions when they are changing like a toddler at a light switch plate with six different lamps. And the "cure" of DBT - well, you learn basic life skills that most people learn as a child - how to control your reactions to your emotions - and the reader would just be incredulous and not believe that the writer could not do that, nay, were unaware it was possible to do that.

Zoe says

I'm more than a little embarrassed to admit that I've known Stacy for 10 years and only just finished reading her lovely memoir yesterday. My delay in reading her work is no indicator of its quality-- just a reflection of my own laziness and terrible reading habits.

That said, it was such a pleasure to read the final product after following Stacy's journey to get this memoir published. As a reader of her Livejournal, I was fortunate enough to read occasional excerpts of the book, along with her tales of frustration as she tried to find the right agent and publisher. I believe that everything she poured into this book completely pays off.

Stacy's memoir focuses on her youth in rural Arkansas, where she felt like an outcast for being bright, creative, and strange. She also developed an eating disorder and began to exhibit symptoms of borderline personality disorder (BPD), which continued to get worse in her teens and twenties. Stacy writes very frankly about how her mental illness impacted her education, her relationships, and her jobs. To say that her raw disclosure is brave is an understatement; it's also chillingly beautiful and desperately needed.

I think Stacy does a beautiful job explaining why her tattoos are so important to her, both as a way to process her pain and reclaim her body. Writing hateful things on herself in Sharpie and then locking herself in a closet was a common form of self-flagellation in her childhood and young adulthood; I love that she has reclaimed her skin as a space for art and affirmation, and I hope that her story inspires others to reconsider the meaning of body modification.

The other part of Stacy's story, which I think is only partially told in this memoir (but I hope she will continue to tell), is her struggle with the mental health care system. The lack of adequate mental health care in this country has led to some devastating news headlines in recent weeks, and people are only beginning to understand the crises faced by those who have untreated mental illness. One of the most relevant parts of the book comes near the end, when Stacy describes her feelings about getting her meds with insurance:

Here is how the psych med story tends to go. After either (a) much convincing or (b) no convincing at all, we crazies march ourselves into the pharmacy one day with a fresh prescription for potential sanity. Once there, we may or may not fork over hundreds of dollars for a month's supply of pink or orange or yellow pillows. If we're one of the lucky ones with health insurance, they hand over the bottle for little or no money, bestowing upon us a chance at getting better. If we're among the 46 million uninsured, well, though shit, we'll just have to be depressed (or suicidal, or homicidal, as the case may be). Having been uninsured for most of my adult life, I will always remember the day when, at age thirty-five, I handed my new insurance card across the counter at Walgreen's and paid three dollars for a thirty-day supply of a drug that normally cost four hundred. I felt privileged, as if I had gained access to some exclusive club, then felt guilty for feeling privileged, then felt an overwhelming sense of relief, like for the first time in my life I could take a breath that went all the way to the bottom of my lungs. I found myself daydreaming about other doctors I could visit: the orthopedist, the audiologist, the gynecologist. Visions of annual pap smears danced in my head.

Maybe Stacy's next memoir will go into greater detail about her recovery process and the need for expanded insurance coverage. In the meantime, I know that many strange girls have been--and will be--saved by this book. I think Stacy has so much more to share with the world, and I'm truly grateful that, even though the journey has been daunting, she's still here.

Julia says

My favorite thing about *Loud in the House of Myself* was the title. When I first saw this book, I knew I would love it. A memoir on mental illness, by a "strange girl," with such a good title? I was eager to get my hands on it.

Unfortunately, I didn't enjoy this book very much and honestly found it a bit annoying. Memoirists don't have the luxury of manufacturing fascinating life events to make the real story more interesting; instead, the reader is drawn to the author rather than the storyline. The problem here was that I didn't feel a connection

with Pershall (and I absolutely thought I would after reading the back cover!). The question is, why? Perhaps something about her personality rubbed me the wrong way and it has nothing to do with the book. However, I think that the problem stemmed from the way the book was written. My biggest issue was that Pershall seems strangely reluctant to let us enter her personal world. Sure, she tells us what she *did*, but her emotions and motivations are often omitted or only briefly touched on. Her visit to Spain stands out as an example of this. It reads like a hazily-remembered spring break account from a friend who was high for the entire trip. The story was interesting, but I didn't feel I learned much about Pershall. Since the memoir lacks the more insightful personal interrogation that I look for in this genre, her bizarre behaviors can easily leave you thinking, "Wow, she's totally nuts" rather than helping you develop more empathy or understanding. It's almost like she's deliberately sensationalizing, not humanizing, herself.

Another issue I had with this book was that she brought up her diagnoses too often. I felt like this was yet another way to distance herself from the reader. She begins talking about BPD and its treatment very early in the book, before we have had the chance to establish a relationship with the author or understand the characteristics of BPD in the context of a person's life. Her transcription of the *DSM-IV* criteria for BPD and the pronouncement that this describes her very well is possibly the most uninteresting way she could have chosen to present herself. (I also found it a bit troubling that she embraces diagnostic labels so much. BPD a very problematic diagnosis and Pershall does not discuss or critique it at all. While diagnoses can help individuals make sense of their experiences and behaviors, it seems contradictory that she refers to herself as a "strange girl" yet views so much of her life through the lens of mental illness.) Throughout the book, diagnoses come up in an unhelpful way. An unusual behavior will be followed by, "this is common in people with BPD," which both throws the reader out of the story and sidesteps the more interesting topic of why *she* acted this way.

I also felt that the writing and narrative were not as strong as they could be. Pershall often lingered over scenes and details that were not particularly informative or interesting (Roommate: "I think you might have BPD." Pershall: "I don't." End scene), but skims over topics that I wanted to hear about. For example, she hints at a troubled childhood relationship with her parents when she states that Linehan's "invalidating environment" applies to her life, but barely describes this relationship. Similarly, she was married to an apparently wonderful and supportive man for six years, but barely mentions him at all. I feel that discussing a long-term relationship would help destigmatize BPD, yet she spends more time discussing the guy she had an affair with than she does her husband. Was this element of her life not dramatic or interesting enough?

As for the writing, I neither loved it nor hated it. Pershall described her childhood well; however, I found other sections to be alternately slow and a bit overdone. I disliked how she started each chapter with the story of one of her tattoos. I felt like this technique interrupted the narrative flow, but seemed to add little to the story. I think the memoir is like Pershall's tattoos – both are attempts to present herself to the world, but in portraying her story, she obscures the emotions and experiences under the surface.

Dustin Ebaugh says

Intelligent, witty, brilliant, heartbreaking, hilarious, hard-to-fathom and hitting home too. If you grew up in a small town in the 80's and were/are even the least bit weird or quirky...this is one GREAT read! It's another one I read slowly, because it's that good. Pershall is an excellent wordsmith and captivating with her story. She's bold enough to not only "come out" with mental illness but do a great deal to help the reader understand it and remove the stigma associated with it. This book is great from start to finish. There's despair, chaos, hope and healing. Quite a recipe for a great book and this one is.