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Carolyn and Ben Reiser moved to Hyland, New Hampshire with their two children for the comforts of rural life. But when the local police chief comes looking for their seventeen-year-old son Jacob to question him about the brutal murder of his girlfriend, the Reisers' lives begin to unravel. A compelling story that will capture you in the opening scene and hold you through its shocking conclusion, Before and After is a stunning novel that pits parent against parent, brother against sister, family against community, blood loyalty against law-as "deep questions of loyalty, honesty, and love are forced to the surface in this psychologically riveting tale." (Library Journal)

Before and After Details

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From Reader Review Before and After for online ebook

Maria says

The scenario a set a parents is suddenly confronted with and how each one reacts makes for a page- turning account that will keep you going to the end. The story at times frustrated me at the same time that it caused me to ask "what would I have done"?

Jacque Roller says

Great book on the challenges and and resilience of a family tragedy. Gives each members stuggle dealing with their high profile after the son accidentally/impulsively kills his girlfriend in a small town.

Jennifer S. Brown says

This book fascinated me, and it's one I'll have to think about. I find it difficult to give this book a star rating, because there isn't a clear cut one I can give it.

The novel is from the point of view of the father (in first person), the mother (in third person), and the sister (third person). The question of what would you do if your child was accused of a gruesome crime is a compelling one, and it definitely had me thinking about my own family. Each character responds in his or her distinct manner, and while I felt for all of them, I didn't feel I really got to know the characters.

The writing is gorgeous. At times, it verged on too gorgeous as the voice of the 12-year-old daughter didn't quite ring true to me. But I kept turning pages, wanting to know what would happen. Jacob, the son, is accused of murder. The book is long, and occasionally it felt it, but I was glad I had read it.

Nancy McDaniel says

Rosellen Brown is a new (to me) favorite author. She is a brilliant, lyrical writer. This 1992 book is very different from her new one, The Lake on Fire, but I loved it a lot. Can't wait to read another!

illi says

i really should have just dnf'd this

Judy says

A powerful concept: an event that is so cataclysmic that it divides your life forever into "before and after."

Patrice says

What a waste of time as well as a load of crap. Murderer (white teen) who confessed to bashing his girlfriend's head in until she died goes free because his parents loved him?? Really??

I wish I had been given a clue before beginning this book that it would be this weak and honestly, this insulting. A more appropriate title would have been "White & Privileged" not Before & After. Don't waste your time on this one.

Erica says

I loved the movie, and usually if I love the movie, I love the book even more. NOT so with this book. I picked it up at a paperback sale and it was like swimming through lava to get through it. It just dragged on and on and on and on. The different POV were interesting (although I don't get why Ben was written in first person and Judith and Carolyn in second person) and I am sure that the scattered train of thought of the parents was meant to accurately portray just how scattered any parents would be if this happened to their family. Very different from the movie in terms of what REALLY happened with Jacob and Martha Taverne...and as I was reading Carolyn's part in the book, I could hear Meryl Streep talking. Same with Jacob and Edward Furlong. Very unusual for me to like a movie more, but in this case...the movie was better.

Favorite quote: "First off, you're in New Hampshire, Ben. This isn't Texas, one of those wild and crazy Southern states that love to pull the lever."

I find that funny because Houston is where they end up moving to after the trial!!!

GRETCHEN B says

Such great story telling, the family of the accused is a viewpoint not often written about.

Jen says

I hated it. Way too much boring details that had nothing to do with the plot, which wasn't that great anyway. And the ending was anti-climactic.

I haven't seen it, but I hear the movie is great.

Huguette Larochelle says

the stories is very good , but there so much said that just confuse me and lost the stories , with too much, i watch the movie , that is lot better then the book .

Karen Lange says

A must read for any mother of a son. Makes you ponder how far would you go to protect him. I loved this book!

Josh says

Here's the thing. It started out pretty solid. It did. I enjoyed about the first half or so (around page 220-ish?). Right until Jacob came back home. After that, it DRAGGED. I can normally finish a book in a couple of days. I got to page 200 in about 3 days. The last 5 were trying to finish it.

It was painful, almost. It started out so promising and I had such high hopes for it. Reading it for a psychological perspective is great. As the book to read before bed, it's fantastic and a lot better than Sleepy time tea. For a comfortable afternoon on the porch? Just...no.

Kira FlowerChild says

Whew! That was a long, hard slog. The story, on the surface, is a fascinating one: What do you, as a parent, do when you suspect - and then find out - that your son has committed murder? Intriguing, right?

Unfortunately, this book manages to make getting to the good stuff - the trial, finding out the truth, the fate of the son - a long and sometimes boring journey. I don't usually take two weeks to read a book, even one that is almost 400 pages. There were many nights when I intended to read longer but Ms. Brown's prose put me to sleep.

The story is told from three points of view: Ben, the father, told in first person; Carolyn, the mother, told in third person; and Judith, the daughter (and sister), also told in third person. I don't object to changing from first to third person if there is a logical reason for it, but I really couldn't see one. The reader does not get to know Ben any better than the other characters, either in the segments he narrates or the ones where we see his actions through the eyes of others.

For that matter, despite the length of the novel and the changing viewpoints, we do not get to know any of the characters very well. The author reveals their actions, but when given the opportunity to reveal their thoughts and motives, generally chooses not to do so. Occasionally, with Ben, we do get motives, but in that case, the author is deliberately evasive about other aspects of the story. For example, we learn why he won't testify against his son, but we do not get to witness the scene in the courtroom where the grand jury is questioning him and we first learn about his feelings regarding the bond between parents and children, something he learned from his father.

We learn that Ben has a temper, and the son, Jacob (the murderer), has an even worse one. Jacob is revealed early on as at least a sociopath and possibly a psychopath. The daughter, Judith, witnesses some of his less

savory activities, such as stoning a dog, and Jacob's forcing Judith to manually masturbate him. Later in the novel there are vague mentions of distasteful (and worse) events witnessed by friends and other members of the town, but no specifics are given.

This is what is so frustrating about this book. The reader has to slog through reams and reams of pointless prose which does not advance the story nor reveal anything about the characters that we don't already know, yet there are many key scenes and incidents that the author glosses over without giving any specifics. In fact, the reader does not get to witness the trial at all. Since all the family members were witnesses, they were not allowed in the courtroom unless they were testifying. (I hope Ms. Brown checked the laws for New Hampshire on this issue; in many states, once a witness testifies, he/she can watch the rest of the trial.) The trial was videotaped (the book was written in 1992; digital media was in its infancy) and the family was able to watch the video after it was all over.

The main question the author poses, and it is an interesting one, is whether a parent should lie to protect his/her son from being sent to prison, possibly for life. Jacob admits to the killing, but states he struck the victim only once. Carolyn, a pediatrician, saw the body long before she knew Jacob was a suspect. The victim's head was almost completely bashed in. It is never clear whether Carolyn told Ben the extent of the victim's injuries, but that wouldn't have mattered to Ben. Ben concocts a believable story that gives room for reasonable doubt that Jacob is the killer. Carolyn ultimately refuses to go along with the lie, and in her testimony tells the story as Jacob originally told it.

Naturally this causes tension, not to mention fights, between Ben and Carolyn. And here is another place where the author seems unable or unwilling to reveal the depth of emotion of the characters. Most couples would split over such a radical difference in the way they treat their children. Couples split over differences in their views on spanking, much less testifying in court and possibly condemning your child to a life sentence. Yet this couple stays together, even though it is obvious that after two trials, and two mistrials, Carolyn's feelings toward Jacob are not the same as they were before she discovered the truth about him.

This book was a disappointment. The author had the chance to dig deep and show us how characters in an impossible situation truly feel and react. Instead, this book had all the depth (or lack thereof) of a Lifetime movie. *And I* wasted two weeks hoping it would finally live up to the promise of its premise. It didn't.

Theresa says

This is a pretty interesting read. It's a novel about a teenage boy who murders his girlfriend. It follows the entire family through the experience. Each chapter is written from a different family member's perspective. It was assigned as a book to read for one of my classes, where the intent was to diagnose and/or explain the behaviors of the family based on what I knew about abnormal development and mental health disorders. From that perspective it was a really interesting read!
