



Sun Shine Down: A Memoir

Gillian Marchenko

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What if?

What if you dreamed of having a beautiful child, and in your mind you saw the life you'd share with that child. First steps, little league (or ballet). Maybe the child would play piano or make you proud on the Honor Roll. There'd be eventual graduations, college, even marriage and grandchildren. You might dream it out that far. Or not. Every parent has hopes. No parents wish for pain—their own, or a child's.

Then you had a premature delivery in a foreign country. And the words swirling around you said a different kind of "what if." What if something was wrong? The dream was at risk—or so it seemed. Would you be ready for that? Could you make peace? Or would it take you down?

These are the questions author Gillian Marchenko faced as she woke up after an emergency C-section in Ukraine. Only her newborn child could answer them, in time. But first she had to find a way to hear more than the words "Down syndrome."

Sun Shine Down. A memoir.

Sun Shine Down: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Sun Shine Down: A Memoir for online ebook

Shannon says

These days it takes me a couple of weeks to finish a book. However, once I picked up "Sun Shine Down" I simply couldn't put it down. I've read several memoirs from parents of children with Down syndrome (DS), but what really set this memoir apart from the others is that the birth took place in the Ukraine--a country where children with DS are institutionalized at a very young age. Marchenko received a birth diagnosis, which can be hard to deal with at first for some parents. In addition to the diagnosis, she received little support and comfort from the hospital, and her daughter was in the NICU for six weeks. All that combined would be emotionally exhausting for anyone. As I read her story I remembered my child's birth diagnosis and recalled how supportive and wonderful most of the hospital staff was, and my heart ached for Marchenko, whose hospital experience was the opposite of mine. Her memoir demonstrates why it's so important for medical professionals to be current on the knowledge of Down syndrome.

Her writing is raw and honest. She doesn't sugar coat her feelings and struggles. She's also descriptive without being wordy. Through it all you can sense her deep and unconditional love for her daughter.

Marchenko's story is one that shows that after the clouds disappear, the sun will shine down again.

Hope Centre Ministries says

Sun Shine Down takes readers on a journey filled with sorrow, struggle, joy and hope. Gillian Marchenko has provided a window into her life as a mother of child with disability and has opened it with honesty and vulnerability. Completely engaging and written beautifully, readers can expect to be moved by this memoir of the heart. A must read for parents and affirming for any who have felt alone on the road of diagnosis and acceptance-- it's a journey that many parents can relate to.

Dan says

While reading this emotionally provocative memoir, I kept hearing the author's embarrassment at how she handled the birth of her daughter who had Down syndrome. I read an admiration into her descriptions of her husband's strength and endurance during those early months, as though he somehow got their family through this and deserved lots of praise.

I'm sure he does.

As a husband myself though (of a wife who similarly thinks too little of herself), I read her words and knew that she, by God's grace, displayed her own faith and grace and strength, not least of which in writing this book, and in admitting something all parents have felt to varying degrees (in the words of her daughter):

"You shouldn't have had kids if it's too hard for you."

Thank you Gillian Marchenko for being honest and not worrying about being perfect.

Amy Hess says

Wow. Really. Transparent. Honest. Beautiful story of Marchenko's walk through hard realities of learning that her daughter has Down Syndrome.

I think the best thing that this book did for me was to help me to step in Marchenko's mind for a little while and see what she sees, feel what she feels. I knew a little of her story before reading, but her storytelling drew me much further than surface details, but heart details.

Jenny Sulpizio says

Honest, deep, and incredibly moving, Sunshine Down is a beautifully written, heartfelt memoir that grabs hold of its reader from the very beginning. Packed with authenticity and raw emotion, Gillian Marchenko invites her audience to witness her incredible journey (and metamorphosis) in mothering a special needs child. Laughter, love, tears, and hope...you'll be forever changed by sweet Polina and her amazing mama.

-Jenny Lee Sulpizio, Author of "Confessions of a Wonder Woman Wannabe."

McKenna says

I couldn't put Gillian's book down. Her story is real and raw and her writing illustrative and beautiful. She leaves you ready for the next part of her story which I hope she is writing!

One of my favorite lines, "She forgave me with her little chubby hand pats on my back, that told me she didn't love me any less for my tardiness. Her unconditional love warmed me deeply."

Kelly Hermann says

I can relate to her story have a special needs child. Kudos to Gillian for putting her story out there.... her feelings is the beginning are mirrored by so many of us!!

Shalanna says

I had high hopes for this book. As a mom to a child with Down syndrome who has seriously struggled with her faith, I thought this book would be a fantastic read for me. Gillian's writing about her daughters birth story is excellent. Filled with raw emotion, brutal honesty, and truth, her story, while different from mine, made me feel like I was right there with her, grieving all over again over my child's diagnosis. I felt for Gillian. I felt her pain, and in the end, I felt her acceptance and love of Polly.

My only complaint about this book is that for me, it seriously lacked from a spiritual standpoint. As the wife of a pastor, I thought this memoir would be filled with Gillian's faith struggles, her means of holding onto her faith in the midst of her struggles, yet it didn't. As someone who struggles with my faith, my trust in God, I had hoped that this book would serve as a kind of connection that I am not alone. It's clear that Gillian struggled with her faith, but she didn't discuss it, hardly at all. That was truly disappointing to me.

Molly says

Honest and raw. As a newly married bride, motherhood is something I am looking forward to. Sun Shine Down gave a glimpse into a life that no one is planning on and the reality of the personal struggles that entail.

Lisa says

I reviewed this book here: [http://turnthepagelisa.wordpress.com/...](http://turnthepagelisa.wordpress.com/)

Suzanne says

Parenthood can be a challenge at the best of times. Add a foreign country and a child with special needs to the mix, and the demands of motherhood are especially daunting. At her lowest point, Gillian Marchenko, the wife of a Ukrainian minister, finds herself getting drunk in the basement. And who could blame her?

In this raw and beautifully written memoir, Marchenko writes with courage and honesty of her journey from Kiev to Chicago, and from despair to acceptance. I'd say it's a must-read for mothers of children with special needs, but anyone would do good to immerse themselves in this story.

Meredith says

Marchenko tells a story that is all her own, as she walks through what many of us would find unimaginable—surgery in a foreign country and the premature birth of a child she didn't know would have Down syndrome. She draws you in to the maternity ward with her accurate and detailed descriptions of a Ukrainian hospital. As a mother of a child with Down syndrome, I find myself in many of Marchenko's pages. She relates the raw emotions that many experience as well as the explicit love and joy that she eventually discovers. She draws a beautiful picture of a desired pregnancy and the dreams of her unborn child and the roller coaster she is taken on as she grieves what she thought would be. Most of all she learns the lessons her daughter has to teach her. This is a story of faith and redemption, without the omission of 'real life' even when it isn't pretty. Though every diagnosis of a child is different, most parents experiencing a life-altering diagnosis for their child will intimately relate with Marchenko and her story.

Sun Shine Down is an honest and moving story that envelops the reader from beginning to end.

Anna says

Gillian is a wonderful writer and she pulls you into her story. Although I am not the mother of a child with Down Syndrome, her story was still very interesting to me and I felt that I could relate to her. She is so very real and doesn't sugar coat her story - she tells the good and the bad and it is heartfelt.

On a side note, Gillian is also a great speaker, if your women's group is ever looking for one!

Wendy Woerner says

This book had me crying, laughing, rejoicing for Gillian and Polly along the way. I found myself nodding frequently. So relatable, real, riveting!

Stephanie says

As a mother of a young son with Down syndrome, I have read my fair share of memoirs from other parents of children with Down syndrome. This one was so real, so raw, and so filled with emotion that I felt I was there with the author, reliving her experiences.

The most interesting parts of Gillian's story are the ones that most people would prefer not to hear about-- birthing a child in a foreign country that virtually shuns all people with disabilities, making a tough decision to leave a life you have been enjoying for several years, and turning to the drink in order to shut off feelings and depression. I found her candor refreshing; her honesty about knowing that secretly drinking in the basement and sleeping all day was not a great choice but the only one she felt she could make at the time was something that most mothers would not speak privately about, let alone write it for all to read.

This memoir is a must read for anyone facing a Down syndrome diagnosis, but also for those of us who have been on this journey for some time.
