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## Book Review

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**BOOK REVIEW**

*Deaf & Sober: Journeys through recovery*

(National Association of the Deaf Publications, 1998)

By Betty G. Miller, Ed.D., C.A.D.C.; \$31.70 - 224 pp., soft cover

In *Deaf & Sober*, Betty G. Miller combines the expertise of a professional with the sensitivity of a consumer to illuminate the overlapping worlds of addiction, recovery and being deaf. She does this with a thoroughness that overlooks nothing -- that leaves no aspect of the experience in shadow.

Addiction, we now know, is a disease. It is a physical disease, but it is also a disease of the spirit, a disease that strikes its victims on a very personal level. It attacks individuals, and it attacks families. It occurs in the context of culture and community and, as we learn in this book, culture and community can contribute both to the genesis of the illness, and to its treatment.

Because addiction and recovery are personal, it is especially appropriate that Dr. Miller chose to write this book through the eyes of dozens of individual people, each of whom tells his or her own story. We hear from deaf people in recovery from all walks of life, both within and outside the deaf community. We hear from deaf and hearing service providers, some of whom are, themselves, in recovery. We hear from family members, interpreters, program directors, even from hearing people in recovery who happen to share meetings with recovering alcoholics and addicts who are deaf. Each story puts a different face on what it is like to be deaf and in recovery, and the sum total illustrates, quite eloquently, the complexity of the experience. There are no generalizations here -- just story after story, combining to make a multi-dimensional whole. To protect confidentiality, Dr. Miller invented pseudonyms for stories she created from a composite of the experiences of deaf people in recovery. Although the stories are fiction, the people are indisputably real.

Dr. Miller's book gives a very hopeful view of recovery. She imparts the sense that although recovering from addiction requires enormous, life-long effort for anyone, deaf or hearing, and although obstacles to recovery can be doubled if one is deaf, there are resources, there is support available, and there is hope. She describes various treatment programs for deaf people in recovery, and points out possible pitfalls as well as key components of them, for the benefit of those who would like to establish such programs. Alcoholics Anonymous is discussed in depth, and we are led through the AA steps and traditions, from the perspective of deaf people in recovery. The reader can see how profound the impact of deafness is, on addiction as well as recovery, and how crucial it is to consider deaf cultural issues, when attempting to provide services. This she shows us, rather than tells us, through the stories that illustrate her points.

One example of the overlap between being deaf and being in recovery, according to Dr. Miller, is this: Some of the ways that deaf children are raised in our society can lead to over-dependency and learned helplessness. This, in turn, can lead to an inability to take responsibility for one's actions and one's fate, which can contribute to chemical dependency. A second example is found in how a close-knit deaf community, by taking care of deaf alcoholics, can actually inhibit their recovery by protecting them from the natural consequences of their actions. Even if friends mean well, they may unconsciously want their alcoholic friend not to

change, and may do things that discourage him or her from working toward recovery. Thus, we can see that understanding recovery is necessary for everyone in the deaf community, not just alcoholics and addicts who are deaf. That is why this book is so important.

Dr. Miller's book is more than a crystal-clear description of an important element of the deaf community. And it is more than a guidebook for those who are in recovery, or want to be in recovery, or want to serve deaf people in recovery. It is an accomplishment by someone who is deaf herself, and in recovery herself, and who knows what she is talking about. If you are, or know, or love someone who is deaf and sober, you will find yourself in this book.

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