



Beautiful Child

By Torey Hayden

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From the bestselling author of *One Child* comes this amazing, true story of a mute and withdrawn seven—year—old girl and the special education teacher determined never to abandon a child in need.

Seven-year-old Venus Fox never spoke, never listened, never even acknowledged the presence of another human being in the room with her. Yet an accidental playground “bump” would release a rage frightening to behold. The school year that followed would be one of the most trying, perplexing, and ultimately rewarding of Torey Hayden’s career, as she struggled to reach a silent child in obvious pain. It would be a strenuous journey beset by seemingly insurmountable obstacles and darkened by truly terrible revelations—yet encouraged by sometimes small, sometimes dazzling breakthroughs—as a dedicated teacher remained committed to helping a “hopeless” girl, and patiently and lovingly leading her toward the light of a new day.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Hayden has chronicled experiences from her long career as a special education teacher in several books, including *One Child* and *The Tiger's Child*. Successes in this difficult and often frustrating field can be few and hard-won, which Hayden deftly illustrates while simultaneously offering hope and joy in small victories. This time she brings to life the story of a scruffy seven-year-old, Venus, who is so unresponsive that Hayden searches for signs of deafness, brain damage or mental retardation. Familiar with Venus's siblings, other teachers warn Hayden not to expect much from Venus. Yet the author is relentless in her attempt to diagnose the cause of Venus's "almost catatonic" state, which is punctuated by occasional violent outbursts.

Suspecting "elective mutism," a refusal to talk "for psychological reasons," Hayden persists in trying to draw Venus out. Her patient dedication finally pays off when the girl shows an interest in She-Ra, Princess of Power comic books. From there, a story of domestic abuse, removal to foster care and a slow emergence from silent isolation unfolds. However, Venus is not the only fascinating character here. Hayden sets Venus's bittersweet and complex story against the backdrop of other students, including one boy with a very high IQ but behavioral problems, another with Tourette's syndrome and a girl who inexplicably spouts sophisticated poetry and talks to her hand. In this first-person narrative, Hayden also shares her own thoughts, worries and strained relationship with a mismatched classroom aide, creating a rich tapestry of the dynamics of a group of special needs youngsters and the adults who try to help them.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-A crisply analytical depiction of one year in a special education classroom. Hayden's approach is straightforward and heartwarmingly compassionate not only in its portrayal of the relationships she developed with her students, but also in its appraisal of a philosophical conflict with her teacher's aide and the effect this had on the functioning of the students. The challenge of creating a highly structured, safe, yet sensitive and supportive environment for five children between the ages of six and nine, all with multiple emotional and developmental handicaps, is a study in creativity, perseverance, and keen observation. The author vividly describes her early struggles to inspire bonding among her charges and incremental progress in leading them toward norms of social behavior. The book ultimately focuses on Venus, age seven, whose impoverished and abusive home life frames the backdrop upon which her steps toward trust are poignantly rendered. Twins Shane and Zane, affected by fetal alcohol syndrome; Jesse, afflicted with Tourette's syndrome; and brash and aggressive Billy certainly present a full spectrum of challenges, but it is with Venus that the teacher's most indomitable problem-solving skills are engaged. Insightful and eminently readable, this book will be of particular value to students with a career interest in special education, social services, or counseling.

Lynn Nutwell, Fairfax City Regional Library, VA

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From Library Journal

Special education teacher Hayden is known for her powerful stories of children suffering from various forms of child abuse and trauma. *Beautiful Child* is another such story. As she did in her previous best sellers (*Just Another Kid*, *Ghost Girl*, *The Tiger's Child*), Hayden passionately narrates the story of her work with a special-needs child, Venus an unresponsive, almost catatonic seven-year-old girl. (Hayden also introduces us to the other children in her classroom primarily to Billy, Jesse, and twins Shane and Zane.) Called "beautiful child" by Wanda, the "sister" who brings her to school, Venus is far from beautiful: her appearance is unkempt, and she morphs from a brick wall into a banshee when her space is invaded. Hayden thoughtfully

describes her struggles to form this particular class into a cohesive group and the many techniques used to coerce even the smallest response from Venus. Slowly, the class bonds, and even more slowly comes progress with Venus. This inspiring true story is recommended for most special-education as well as psychology collections. Terry Christner, Hutchinson P.L., KS
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Duckett:

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Cynthia Richards:

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Mary Stone:

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