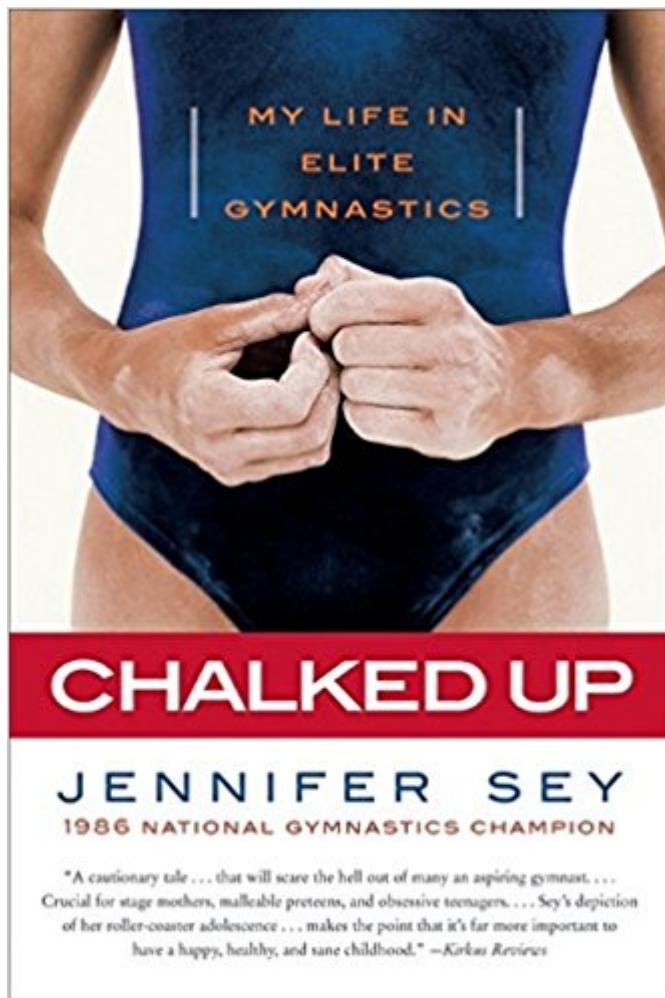


The book was found

Chalked Up: My Life In Elite Gymnastics



Synopsis

Fanciful dreams of gold-medal glory led Jennifer Sey to the local gymnastics club in 1976. A natural aptitude and a willingness to endure punishing hard work took her to the elite ranks by the time she was eleven years old. Jennifer traveled the country and the world competing for the U.S. National team, but the higher she set her sightsâ "the world championships, the 1988 Olympicsâ "the more she began to ignore her physical and mental well-being. Jennifer suffered devastating injuries, developed an eating disorder, and lived far from family and friends, all for the sake of winning. When her parents and coaches lost sight of her best interests, Jennifer had no choice but to redefine her path into adulthood. She had to save herself. Chalked Up delivers an unforgettable coming-of-age story that will resonate with anyone who has ever felt not good enough and has finally come to accept who they were meant to be.

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Customer Reviews

Like Jenn and Betty who have already posted their reviews, I was a Parkette with Jen Sey from 1985-1987. Before Jenn and I moved in with J. Sey, we lived with some other girls in Jessica's (who has also posted) parent's house (who took in boarders living away from home). Jessica was already in college by the time I got there in 1985. I can tell you from first hand experience that what we ate was monitored and sometimes reported to the Strausses. The only thing we were allowed to have without asking was water. It was just the way it was and we all accepted it because like Jen, we all wanted to be champions. The things that Jessica claims are outright lies happened after she had left. She claims to have talked to 20 girls who trained with us during that time but she certainly hasn't talked to me (or Jen, Tracy, Betty, etc). In her review and her comments on NPR (which

seemed pretty scripted to me), Jessica gets very caught up on specific examples Jen gives (like Mr. Strauss throwing a chair "AT" a gymnast). I mean, what are you saying Jess, that he did throw a chair, but just in her general direction...so it wasn't that big of a deal? Also, the announcement over the loudspeaker about a young gymnast's 2 lb weight gain and telling her she's going to look like her obese mother if she wasn't careful. Come on...those of us who were there remember how much grief she used to get about her parents size. What I don't get, as one reviewer said above, is why all the outrage? This is Jen's story. Many of us lived it right along side with her (although it's fascinating how much we actually isolated ourselves from each other during that time...even though we were all living together and going through the same stuff).

I didn't get into gymnastics until 1996, so I was unfamiliar with Jennifer Sey until I read this book. After reading it, however, I felt like I could really empathize with her, as well as her family and teammates (it was harder to empathize with the coaches, I admit). On the surface, it may seem like this book is a scandalous exposé, and I have no doubt that many people will read it as such. But to me, it was a coming-of-age story about a girl who got swept up in a subculture that, unfortunately, tends to lead to disordered thinking about pressure, body image, injury, and "normal" life. Jennifer Sey does a great job in this book of explaining all the factors that led to her success in gymnastics, as well as her ultimate downfall -- the need for achievement, need to please, competitiveness, and perfectionism. She's fair when it comes to explaining her parents' or coaches' roles, while at the same time taking responsibility for what was her dream. For me, this was an incredibly thought-provoking book. Not only is it an interesting subject, but the prose is fluid and powerful, helping the reader get into the mindset of an elite gymnast who is training on a broken ankle, competing on the world stage, and lost in a lonely world where being a gymnast is her only identity. This book is about gymnastics on the surface, but really it has a lot more depth. It's about a relationship of a daughter with her mother, and the sacrifices a parent will make for her child's dream -- even long after the daughter stops wanting it. It's about a child's need to find something that defines her, even if it swallows her whole. It's about the choices we must make when something that we're good at or used to enjoy stops being fun, or stops being a place where we can shine.

I just finished reading "Little Girls in Pretty Boxes," and "Chalked Up" is written in a similar vein. Both books are withering attacks on the gymnastics industry and its emphasis upon winning at all costs. However, whereas "Little Girls in Pretty Boxes" serves as a call to action, having been written with an eye towards reform, "Chalked Up" is a memoir with no apparent aim other than personal

catharsis. It is Jennifer Sey's story of her years as an elite competitor, an experience which left her with ambivalent feelings about the sport and a lasting and "profound sense of inadequacy." Jennifer Sey was the 1986 U.S. National Gymnastics Champion. To attain that goal, she sacrificed any semblance of a normal adolescence, spending seven hours a day in the gym and alternately starving herself and downing laxatives to keep her body in a state of prepubescence. She had few friends outside the gym. Her friendships with gymnasts "centered on trading weight-loss tips" and were marked by "a cloaked but vicious competitiveness." Sey's family also made sacrifices - too many sacrifices, some might say. Whenever Jennifer advanced in her skills and "moved up" to a new gym, her brother was forced to switch schools and gyms (he too was a gymnast, but perennially in his sister's shadow). When Jennifer became a member of the Parkettes, a prestigious gymnastics squad based in Allentown, Pennsylvania, her mother drove the children two hours each way to the gym, five days a week. After a while, the commute became too onerous, so Jennifer's mother and brother moved to Allentown, leaving Jennifer's father alone in their home in New Jersey. Jennifer's mother took a job working in the front office at the Parkettes' gym and her life came to revolve entirely around her daughter's gymnastics career.

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