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REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

JOY RIDE

My One-Legged Journey to Self-Acceptance

Karen Witt Daly

CreateSpace (410 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

A woman who had her right leg amputated as a child addresses her compulsions and her relationship with her body.

In 1959, Daly was diagnosed with bone cancer—she was 8 years old. By 11, she had experienced the trauma of having her right leg and pelvis amputated. The opening of her debut memoir recounts her early years, which initially were similar to those of most children growing up in New Jersey in the 1950s. The daughter of loving parents, she recalls simple delights, such as sticking her finger in the frosting of a cake or running to the bar across the road from the family’s Hoboken apartment to call her father home for dinner and being given peanuts by the bartender. Her life changed when she began to feel terrible aches in her right leg, which were first diagnosed as growing pains before the underlying cancer was found. After being referred to an orthopedic surgeon, she endured radiation treatment, with the added anguish of watching young cancer patients die. The account goes on to address how Daly dealt with life on her journey into

adulthood following the amputation. Overeating became a coping strategy for her, which developed into bulimia. She also began stealing for the “rush of excitement and power.” Her pathway toward self-acceptance became clearer when, in her 40s, she discovered a form of improvisational dance that allowed her to open communication channels between her mind, body, and spirit. The strength of this deeply moving memoir lies in its blunt honesty regarding self-perception: “I feel ashamed of wanting my distorted body to look sexy, like it’s impossible, something no one will ever think I am. Still, I hold out hope Paul will be attracted to me.” Yet coupled with her straight-talking approach, she expresses a beguiling tenderness toward readers: “I hope you find a friend in the girl I write about.” The life recalled here is punctuated with harrowing challenges, several of which appear insurmountable. But the author proves to be a true inspiration, and every sentence seems to smolder with her tenacity.

Sharp, courageous writing in a powerful memoir.