

Trudzik, Ardith (2009). *If You Tell ... It Will Kill Your Mother*. Ottawa, Canada: Borealis Press <http://www.borealispress.com/ifyoutellitwillkillyourmother.html>

Reviewed by Ashley Bunnell Leonard, BSW, and Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 7, Number 1 (2010)

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This review is written with two voices: One (Ashley) who has a specialty in Child Protective Services (CPS), while the other (Steve) has a specialty in gerontology. This book will generate interest in both areas of social work practice and research. Within the Foreword, Dr. Andrew Cave (psychiatrist) states that the intended audience includes physicians and patients with Multiple Personality Disorder and Dissociative Disorder. Later, he writes that primary health care disciplines, practitioners, and students would find the book useful. We feel that this book would have a strong appeal to CPS workers (both BSW and MSW) and social work professors who teach child welfare courses. In fact, we agree that *If You Tell ... It Will Kill Your Mother* should be an excellent required reading in a child welfare course. In addition, we believe that those who specialize in gerontology will find that this book answers some important aging questions – to be addressed later.

If one would have to categorize *If You Tell ... It Will Kill Your Mother*, the book would best be characterized as a quasi autobiography. Most of the chapters are written in the first person by Ardith Trudzik. She unfolds a story of her life as a victim of vicious sexual abuse and exploitation. From her experiences emerge an array of psychiatric diagnoses. The repression of these sexual experiences appears to have exacerbated her emotional disorders which finally accumulated into a “nervous breakdown.” The breakdown was the precipitating factor that led to the acknowledgment that Ardith had gallantly suppressed her experience—at the expense of her emotional well-being. Simply stated, her ability to repress her experiences led to a worsening of her psychological state.

Each chapter shares a common writing pattern. The chapters are constructed with a unique style where

Ardith offers the reader the ability to engage in the content. Each chapter is written with various font changes to keep the reader connected with various color drawings and poems. At the end of each chapter, the author leaves the reader with the psychiatrist’s analysis of the therapy sessions involving Ardith’s life events. The linkage between Ardith’s description of her life events and the therapist’s analysis provides a profound level of insight. Social workers commonly employ the term *mutuality* to describe this dynamic.

There are several major aspects of this book that provide vital information which is particularly important for the education of BSW and MSW social work students. By reading the book, CPS practitioners will gain critical insight that they would not have otherwise received. These insights include but are not limited to the following:

- Information in the book will expand students’ and practitioners’ knowledge of Multiple Personality Disorder and Dissociative Disorders. These disorders are common outcomes of sexual child abuse.
- Ardith’s description of her world view offers great insight to the world of sex abuse in a manner that could *never* be achieved by intensely studying diagnostic manuals, research and other material usually required for academic assignments and in-service training.
- The detection of child sexual abuse is an emotionally complex enterprise. Ardith opens the private door to the world of sexual child abuse in a profound manner. She offers the social worker insight into how to articulate statements and questions that would be most effective in eliciting best

responses from a victim without inducing undo emotional distress.

- The old adage “begin where the client is” emerges as a common theme. The trusting relationship between the practitioner and the victim must be paramount in all intervention strategies. This basic trust is the vital catalyst for successful treatment. Treatment cannot be hurried.
- An understanding of basic medical terms is essential for communication between social work practitioners and physicians who are part of the intervention team. When a social work practitioner lacks a basic understanding of human biology, treatment can be stifled.
- Victims of sexual abuse *withhold* information. In Ardith’s case, she withheld information for over 40 years to the detriment of her long-term emotional health. Practitioners must understand that when a series of unexplainable peculiar behavioral manifestations emerge, hypotheses regarding sexual abuse should be investigated.

Within the field of gerontology, Life Review and Reminiscent therapies are held in high esteem with little critical analysis. Ardith’s work provides the evidence that demonstrates the importance of in-depth social histories, which are the prerequisite for providing Life Review and Reminiscent intervention. For example, a nursing home social worker could

easily extract repressed sexual abuse memories in a manner that could induce a psychotic reaction. It is unlikely that any full time nursing home employee would have the skills or training to respond appropriately or even recognize the episode for what it is.

It does not take a college education to recognize a psychiatric disorder. However, training and insight is the prerequisite to identify causal linkages and the proper intervention—particularly if the disorder emerged as a consequence of repressed sexual exploitation. In addition, without trusting and knowledgeable practitioners, clients will continue to suffer. Here, we state *nothing new*. However, Ardith’s book articulates these well accepted premises in a manner that has been absent in the literature. She provides a new vision for the treatment of sexually exploited children and adults that will significantly improve our intervention.

We feel that Ardith Trudzik’s *If You Tell ... It Will Kill Your Mother* is a profoundly important book for social work students, practitioners, and professors. The book provides insights that other works in this specialty are unable to achieve. We believe that this book could be required reading for anyone involved in child protective services. In addition, social work libraries should order this book. The book is very readable and as a consequence, it would fit well into the collection of most public libraries.