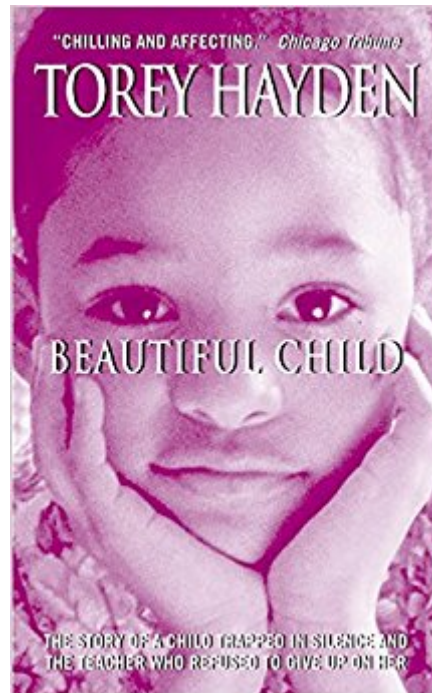




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Beautiful Child



Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *One Child* comes this amazing, true story of a mute and withdrawn seven-year-old girl and the special education teacher determined never to abandon a child in need.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

Book Information

Mass Market Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Avon; Reprint edition (April 29, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060508876

ISBN-13: 978-0060508876

Product Dimensions: 4.2 x 1 x 6.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 0.3 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars See all reviews (101 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

When author Torey Hayden first meets Venus, then 7, the child is perched atop a high wall on the school playground. Venus rarely speaks and goes into attack mode when jostled by other children on the playground. Venus remains a silent observer in the class she shares with 9-year-old Billy, a gifted child with a minor case of dyslexia and a propensity for impulsive behavior; 8-year-old Jesse, a boy who has Tourette's Syndrome; 6-year-old twins Shane and Zane who have the congenital condition of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and part-time resource pupils 8-year-old Gwennie, a bright girl whose behavior and verbalizations are described as autistic and 8-year-old Alice, also given to

frequent non sequiturs interspersed with very poignant comments. This group finally unites after a series of setbacks. Early in the year, fighting broke out constantly among the boys; Venus, too displayed a fair share of aggression whenever she attacked someone who bumped into her. The tension among the pupils was paralleled in Torey Hayden's differing educational approaches with her aide, Julie. Matters reach a critical head when Venus is placed on homebound instruction for 2 months after she severely injures another child. During her absence, the boys team up by forming the poignantly ironic named group, "the Chipmunks" as a way of helping one another and gaining positive reinforcement. When Venus returns, she literally has to start from scratch. A chance encounter with a 1980s comic figure, She-Ra, sparks her curiosity; from there, Venus and teacher Torey Hayden knock down yet another wall. Venus expresses her wishes for a better life and for power and a "magic sword" like She-Ra has; she begins to inch her way into the group.

Torey Hayden's books are not simply books any more than Torey Hayden is simply "a teacher." I have learned more from this woman's writing alone than I did in my entire high school career. I've learned about human nature, about idealism and optimism, about passion and children and the genuine power of love (and a hell of a lot of pluck and charisma) that is so often discredited as "luck" or the abilities gleaned from formal training. Venus didn't speak and was unresponsive to the point that Torey initially thought she was deaf. Her problems proved to be far more debilitating than that, the very least of which being the attitude towards her from the staff at her school. Venus wasn't worth the effort to save. She was too far gone. Too unintelligent. Too stubborn. To bring her back to our world would be an impossibility. Venus isn't our only child here. As always, Torey puts us right in the middle of the controlled chaos of her classroom. Here we meet Billy, uncontrollable-and with the glimmers of beyond average intelligence; Jesse, a handful and a half afflicted with Tourette's; Shane and Zane, twin boys with borderline IQs as a result of FES; Gwennie, a high-functioning autistic child who could tell you anything about any country in the atlas but unable to have a meaningful conversation; and Alice, a little girl only describable as "quirky" and far behind academically. As with all of Torey's classes, it's impossible for the reader not to fall in love with these kids. Their disabilities no longer seem quite so dismal, and we laugh right along with them. We also meet Julie, an aide with a slightly maddening pacifist attitude. This is the first time we really feel Torey's bristling frustration page after page at a time.

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