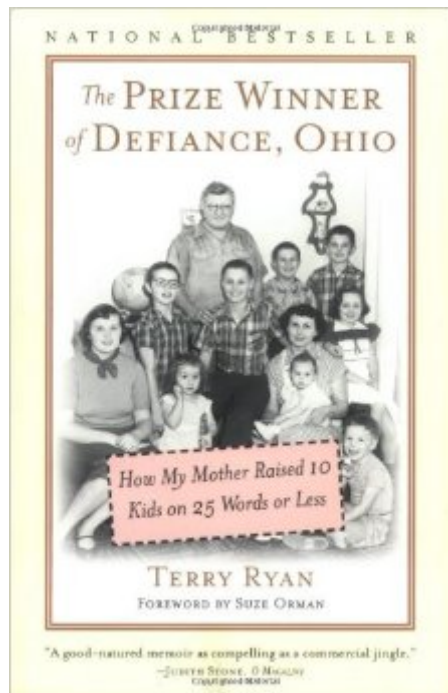


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The Prize Winner Of Defiance, Ohio: How My Mother Raised 10 Kids On 25 Words Or Less



Synopsis

The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio introduces Evelyn Ryan, an enterprising woman who kept poverty at bay with wit, poetry, and perfect prose during the "contest era" of the 1950s and 1960s. Evelyn's winning ways defied the church, her alcoholic husband, and antiquated views of housewives. To her, flouting convention was a small price to pay when it came to raising her six sons and four daughters. Graced with a rare appreciation for life's inherent hilarity, Evelyn turned every financial challenge into an opportunity for fun and profit. The story of this irrepressible woman, whose clever entries are worthy of Erma Bombeck, Dorothy Parker, and Ogden Nash, is told by her daughter Terry with an infectious joy that shows how a winning spirit will always triumph over poverty.

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Customer Reviews

For those of you who have seen the movie and now have become interested in finding out more about Evelyn Ryan and her remarkable career as mother/jingle writer, my advice: buy the book! I grew up in Defiance, Ohio, and actually attended school with some of the Ryan clan. I remember very vividly when Bruce won the Triumph sports car for the sandwich jingle. It was such an exciting time for little ol' Defiance. Then...Bruce never drove the car to school, nor did we ever see hide nor hair of it again. I never knew why until I read the book! The book is very true to the times in a small town in the 1950s. People lived a quieter, gentler life. Tuff (Terry Ryan, the author) was a little spitfire that took no nonsense from anyone. It amazed me how she could write about the horrific things her father did and yet not have him come off as the Poster Boy for "Father Grinch of the

Year." Tuff's book focuses on her mother as a mother, the keeper of the flame, the lighthouse beam in the dark and stormy night. The book does not focus on the relationship between the mother and the alcoholic father. The egregious acts of the father, in the book, are very quietly "slipped" into the story, but Tuff refrains from characterizing her father as an undesirable parent. Tuff does not let the negativity of his actions influence the positivity of her mother's love, devotion, and talent. If you've seen the movie, discard the "saintly" portrayal of the mother and the incredulous idea of everytime the Ryans needed money, a miracle happened, and she won a jingle contest. In reality, the miracles DID happen, but the movie does not show all the times Evelyn did not win. The book is a thousand times better than the movie, and, although I think most people will laud the movie for its positive message and its "feel good" quality, like any other movie...the book is way better!

You know how sometimes you read a book, and then a year or two later you can't remember much of anything about it? Not so with this one. I would bet a lotta money that anyone who has read this book will never, ever forget it. It doesn't hurt that it's one of the best titles of all times, helping make the book unforgettable. How Mrs. Ryan triumphed and managed to support 10 kids and a weak, alcoholic husband by winning jingle-writing contests will go down in literary history. And the book's not saccharine; it doesn't preach; and it doesn't damn. Others among us may damn the 50s, the Catholic church, Mr. Ryan... But Terry Ryan does not. Besides all those virtues, it's just very, very funny.

Terry Ryan has written a touching memoir of her plucky, talented, and wise mother, Evelyn Ryan. The writing style is as straightforward, midwestern, and pragmatic as the remarkable family it describes. Both an object lesson in the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity and a record of one woman's inspiring optimism, this book also reflects the texture of life in 1950s mid-America -- when cars, washing machines, lawn mowers, and TVs were not yet taken for granted. Almost an oral history, it will become part of the record of that fast-fading time period, partly thanks to Evelyn's foresight in saving her letters and the many jingles that she entered in an amazing array of contests, and that enabled her to keep her struggling family afloat. Especially moving is the love this practical and humorous mother inspired (and continues to inspire) in her ten children, and the way they managed to love, judge, and forgive their father all at the same time. This book brought me to tears; I'm going to send a copy to my 83-year-old father, both to remind him of the times he's been through and how much I love him.

Terry Ryan grew up as one of ten children in a chaotic household in Defiance, Ohio. Her mother Evelyn worked tirelessly to stretch the small amount of money her father brought home, especially since that husband, Kelly Ryan, was an alcoholic. Evelyn turned to contests to bring in money and prizes to keep her family afloat. A witty, well-read woman who was determined to see the bright side of every situation, Evelyn kept the family together. This is a warm, honest look at life in the 1950's and 60's. After turning to the police and the church for help, the family learns to rely on a close network of family and friends. Most of all, this big family learn to look out for one another and to help whenever they could. The rhythm of life in a big family comes out loud and clear, the constant struggle for space, for recognition, and the many trips to schools, dentists and doctors, even the occasional visit to the police. There are many times when the Ryan family was close to eviction, or completely empty cupboards. The family went without many times, but don't seem to carry a lasting sense of deprivation. Terry Ryan is also very upfront about the effects of her father's drinking, the anger, the violence and the resentment. It is also a look at a woman who seemed to be restricted by times and circumstances expressed her wit and gift for words. This is a wonderful tribute to a mother who was determined to do all she could to give her family what they needed. The monetary struggles are borne with a fierce dignity (although hindsight makes the author realize that it took its toll). Evelyn Ryan's refusal to give in to self pity or anger, and her compassion and understanding for others' shortcomings are remarkable and the greatest legacy any mother could leave her family.

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