



# Karen

*Marie Killilea*

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## **Karen** Marie Killilea

"A wonderful story of human courage, patience, and triumph. But you'll want to read it most for Karen's own words: 'I can walk, I can talk. I can read. I can write. I can do anything.'" - *The New York Times*

Yes, these are Karen's own words. The words of a small, pig-tailed, freckle-faced child. Yet, no truer words were ever spoken, for Karen had just lived a miracle.

"Extraordinary is the word to be used first, last, and repeatedly about this book. Anyone who meets Karen, even on paper, will postpone resigning from the human race." *The Saturday Review*.

## **Karen Details**

Date : Published January 1st 1967 by Dell (first published 1952)

ISBN : 9780440143765

Author : Marie Killilea

Format : Paperback 286 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Biography, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography Memoir

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## **From Reader Review Karen for online ebook**

### **Betty Ast says**

Excellent book about a child struggling with MS and winning!

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### **Joan says**

I received this from a favorite Aunt in Montreal as a child. I have no idea how many times I read this but it could be in 3 digits. It certainly is high up in two digits! It didn't occur to me for many years why my Aunt had picked this particular book and its sequel to give me. I have multiple disabilities and could relate in many ways to Karen more than many people. Like her I had multiple surgeries, including on my hips as a child. Since my parents over protected me, I strongly suspect my wise Aunt was making sure I got a dose of reality and learned it could have been much much worse for me.

There was lots of love in the family, and luckily, a good sense of humor was had by all the kids in the family, especially Karen. This book is Karen as a preteen. The second book takes her roughly from either teen or tween years to a young lady.

I'm not sure if this is still in print any more but if it isn't, I hope someone brings it back into print! Anyone who reads it will never mutter about how it is unfair that disabled people get the best, closest parking spaces or any other perceived "advantages" in life. We have enough difficulties, both physically and emotionally, that the few advantages are insufficient to balance out the struggle in life. I'm not moaning and saying poor me, but if people think it is easy being disabled, read between the lines of this book and get a sense of what it really is like.

Thank you Aunt Florence for one of the wisest gifts you ever gave me!

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### **Thannasset says**

This is a biography of her daughter, and in places almost an autobiography, by a woman with a severely handicapped daughter.

It was intensely engaging to me then, and holds up now to re-reading.

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### **Lisa Vegan says**

I reread this book multiple times. It's the true story of a girl (with cerebral palsy) and her family, written by the mother, who knows how to tell an interesting story. This was in the era before CP was easily diagnosed and well before the Americans with Disabilities Rights Act. I found it inspiring.

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## **Homeschoolmama says**

This is one of those classic books that deserves a 5 star review. For the inspiring story that it is, for the superb writing, the humor, grit, honesty and the history behind it as well. Marie Killilea tells the story of her daughter Karen, who was born with cerebral palsy in the early 1940's, a time when PT and OT services were virtually non-existent. The story includes anecdotes, conversations, struggles, and also a parallel story of how Mrs. Killilea helped found the National United Cerebral Palsy Foundation. Delightful and inspiring. This was my second reading of the book. I'm reading the sequel now for the first time!

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## **Majenta says**

"A hospital, for most people, is a robber's den, holding them hostage and appropriating something before releasing them--an appendix, tonsils, or pounds of flesh after an illness." (p.13) How true!

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## **Jennifer says**

Every time I read my copy, I'm blown away by Karen's story. She overcame so much to achieve a productive life after her parents were told to leave her in an institution and forget they ever had her. The family as a whole provided support and hope for thousands of other families struggling with CP and without the Killileas, development of CP devices and surgeries would have been held back for many decades. Even without all of that, you will fall in love with the entire family. I wish I knew where they all were now!

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## **Alison says**

I read this back in the 6th grade. I didn't read much then, but this book had a huge impact on me, such that I still remember it today. It is the story of a girl growing up with cerebral palsy, all that her mother did for her, and the success of her life.

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## **Mary says**

I read this as a child and cried and laughed with Karen and her mother and family. Karen was born with cerebral palsy, it affects muscle tone-- either rigid muscle tone or floppy flaccid muscles. Muscles are not just your extremities so it comes with a whole host of health problems. Treatments have improved and when I reread this I was so happy. Karen is a strong girl in spirit...her goal is to live as normal a life as possible with hard work and even pain. Her mother is relentless in helping her towards that goal. Family is always available and the faith they share helps carry the day. It still horrified me that a doctor would advise a parent to just put a little one in an institution and walk away. Mom, of course did not. The head to toe brace also still horrified me.

The Catholic family atmosphere (pre Vatican II) was a walk down memory lane which I enjoyed.  
An easy read with uplifting true story.

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## Manybooks says

If I consider Marie Killilea's true story about her daughter Karen's struggle with a severe form of cerebral palsy simply on the basis of how I personally feel with regard to my emotions (how the account has affected and continues to affect my heart and soul), Karen is most definitely a shining and glowing five star book. For aside from the wondrous truth that how the Killilea family as a whole comes sweetly and lastingly together to fight not only for Karen, but for CP patients in general is both heartening and inspiring, especially the mother's (Marie Killilea's) insistence to so-called medical specialists that Karen be raised at home, that Karen receive therapy, rehabilitation and such, this all has done much to not only make cerebral palsy more understandable, more approachable as a syndrome, it also (and historically) slowly started to change the mindsets of the medical establishment, whose members at the time of Karen's diagnosis with CP often still considered patients afflicted as barely human and as individuals to be permanently hidden away in institutions or back rooms (hidden from view, hidden from the public eye, an attitude cruelly inhumane, but also a viewpoint that was unfortunately often shared by the general public, and yes, unfortunately sometimes is still common, no matter what advances both medically and socially have been made).

But all the above having been said, as inspiring as Karen is and no matter how much I do appreciate not only reading about how Karen through hard work, through sometimes even tough love and support learns how to walk (albeit with crutches and braces), talk, read and write (how she in her own words learns how to do "everything"), the rather constant religiosity presented in Karen does at times feel a bit uncomfortable and wearing to and for me.

Now please do note that while I am NOT in any manner being critical of the faith in God and Jesus Christ that the Killilea family obviously possesses, presents and which comes through especially strongly in Marie Killilea's writing style, her choice of printed words (for I myself also strongly believe in God), I do find it a trifle repetitive and tedious that Catholicism, that Christianity, that God and Jesus Christ are so constantly and repeatedly mentioned and pontificated about. Because for me, my faith is intensely and totally a private matter between myself and God, and thus constantly having to read about the Killilea's family's religious beliefs, about God, about Jesus, about holy miracles becomes not only a bit like a proverbial broken record, but personally, there is also something a bit strangely evangelical presented, almost as though especially the author, especially Karen's mother wants her readers, wants us to embrace Catholicism, to embrace and follow Catholic Christianity and dogma (something that I do find personally uncomfortable and not really what the purpose of this story, of Karen, should in any manner ever be).

And thus, while I do still very much recommend Marie Killilea's Karen as an inspirational, inherently positive and engaging account, suitable for anyone with an interest in challenges and special needs, for older children from above the age of ten or so to adults (and warmly consider the close and loving family ties of the Killileas and that the individual family members all help Karen strive for excellence and success, whilst also often weathering multiple set backs and even potential tragedies, as wonderful so-called life lessons), as an adult rereading Karen, I do leave the necessary caveat of the rather in one's face religiosity, and that at least I, personally, did and continue to feel a bit preached at on occasion, that author Marie Killilea does seem to be actively evangelising at times, something that I might not so much have noticed when I first read Karen as a teenager, but something that I do very much notice now, and enough for me to feel rather uncomfortable even amidst my joy and love of and for the book (and an issue that in particular does make me hesitant to consider suggesting Karen especially to and for atheist and/or non Christian potential readers without prior warnings). Three stars!

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## **Rebecca McNutt says**

*Karen* is a really gripping and shocking but ultimately uplifting story filled with spirit and originality.

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## **Elizabeth says**

This book, along with the sequel (*With Love from Karen*) were assigned reading in my nursing school pediatric rotation. It had never occurred to me to not accept handicapped people in life - in my grade school there were twin sisters affected by CP and severe learning disabilities that were simply a part of life. So were the children with residual damage from polio and partially deaf from ear infections. They were just part of my life. When I discovered that parents had to fight to get some education for their disabled children, I was horrified! And this was long before PL-1074 was passed.

As an example of the effect this book had on me, my first husband and I traveled to New Milford CN (from Atlanta GA) in order to obtain a Newfoundland dog from the Cherns at Little Bear Kennels. We loved him until he died. I often wondered what happened to all the Killileas whom I had come to love and admire. I found out with a Google Search. I wish I could hug all the Killileas who still live!

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## **Cathy says**

This dog-eared book that I read sometime in the late 1970's continues to be a perennial favorite. Written by the mother who helped form the Cerebral Palsy Association, it tells of the struggles of parents faced with an exceptional child trapped in a disabled body and doctors who recommended "putting her away" and "forgetting" about her. The struggles and hopes of this family will make you laugh, cry and believe in the human spirit. You don't have to be Catholic to read this, but it helps. This large, devoted Pre-Vatican II family will have you cheering and praying for Karen.

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## **Gina Giuliano says**

I first read this book when I was about 12. At the time, it interested me, but I didn't really identify with the family. I decided to re-read it as an adult. I felt differently about it the second time around. As a kid, I imagined Karen (who was born with CP) as my age - because in the book, she was. Now I realize that she was born in 1940, and by the time I read the book, she was already an adult. I also missed the fact that her mother had such a huge role in raising awareness and access to services for people with disabilities. Another interesting aspect of this book is that it takes place in Westchester County, NY.

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## **Kate says**

In middle school, during my melodrama phase, I loved this book. Karen is a girl who had cerebral palsy in

the 1950s and 1960s when her parents pretty much had to make up treatment, and one doctor told them to put Karen in an institution and let her die. The mother started organizing around CP. As a child I remember thinking that they seem very close and loving. There were also very devote Pre-Vatican II Catholics, which kind of fascinated me.

I re-read this as an adult and it's a little creepy. I'm sure some it just offends my feminist sensibilities and the medical treatments seem kind of barbaric. The family dynamics seem a little weird and there are whole in the story. However, it was one of the first books that provided a remotely realistic picture of a child with a disability.

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