



My Awesome Place: Autobiography of Cheryl Burke

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A rare authentic glimpse into the electrifying arts scene of New York City's East Village during the vibrant 1990s, *My Awesome Place* is the chronicle of a movement through the eyes of one young woman working to cultivate her voice while making peace with her difficult, often abusive, family.

An unlikely story for someone whose guidance counselor recommended a career as a toll taker on the New Jersey Turnpike, Burke was determined to escape her circumstances by any means available—physical, intellectual or psychotropic. Her rise to prominence as the spoken word artist known as Cheryl B brought with it a series of destructive girlfriends and boyfriends and a dependence on drugs and alcohol that would take nearly a decade to shake.

In the months following her death, members of Burke's close-knit writing group, who had met continuously for nine years, worked to compile her drafts, essays and emails into a completed manuscript which was eventually synthesized into its final form by Burke's close friend, novelist Sarah Schulman. This autobiography tracks her struggle to transcend her working class New Jersey roots and define herself as an artist against the backdrop of an unforgiving city, a series of disastrous girlfriends and boyfriends, and an intense, intimate relationship with drugs and alcohol. By the time Burke got sober in 2001, she had witnessed—and made major contributions to— one of the most remarkable artistic transformations that New York City has ever experienced.

My Awesome Place: Autobiography of Cheryl Burke Details

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Author : Cheryl Burke

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From Reader Review My Awesome Place: Autobiography of Cheryl Burke for online ebook

Elizabeth says

Bitingly funny and insightful, it broke my heart and made me want to do more. Like Cheryl B.'s life, it's over too quickly. I wish there were more.

Derrick says

well she calls me "keith" in the book and i almost deduct a star for that because its my least favorite name. for me this book is painful to read, but thats because i loved her. at the same time i think everyone should read it. she'd be so thrilled.

besides my name, my only disappointment in the book is that there isn't more of her poetry in it, so in some ways the book strikes me as a portrait of an artist without any of the art. but hopefully the book inspires people to look up her art online. xx

Bevin says

Cheryl's friends and her literary executor put together her memoir work so that it could be published and we can know more about her life. Like what it was like to grow up in Staten Island and New Jersey in an alcoholic home with a controlling mom and a dad who broke a plate of spaghetti over her head when she told him she got into NYU. How she drowned her feelings in alcohol and drugs but also learned how to trust her creative spirit. How she became this amazing poet and performer and made a name for herself in the 90s on the slam poetry scene, touring the country and writing plays.

How she dealt with continuing a relationship with her family even though it wasn't at all easy. Working through her father's death. Watching her good friend go through cancer and acting as his caretaker. How she bounced back from a guidance counselor who told her to be a toll taker on the NJ Turnpike and clearly she is a genius artist (that part of the book actually made me angry).

It sounds like everything in the book is heavy stuff. And even though a lot of it is, Cheryl moves through the words with such energy it becomes easy to understand, move through it and laugh a lot. Cheryl's really well known for her sarcasm and wit and that blankets the book.

I felt like it was such a gift, to get to know her better through this book. I had no idea what she lived through and how she managed to become the caring and wry person I knew. I knew she had been ten years sober but I didn't know the extent of her survival.

I also enjoyed her journey to her sexuality. It's trite to say it's a coming out story, but it is a really compelling path to dating women and starting to have serious girlfriends and then having a boyfriend and navigating people's reactions and judgments around queerness and bisexuality. I think folks who have experience dating across the gender spectrum will find this aspect very relatable.

Larry-bob Roberts says

Blazed through the book - I found it very engaging. Really regret that I didn't have the chance to meet Cheryl in person. Portrays that reality that relationships, particularly with family, are made of a tangle of feelings, from trauma to laughter, from hate to love. Pleased to see that the book was recognized with a Lambda Award in the Bisexual Literature category.

Piepie says

Cheryl B came of age in the writing/performing arts scene in NY in the 90s-2000s. She died of bleomycin poisoning while being treated for lymphoma in 2011. Her autobiography was finished after her death by members of her writing group.

I enjoyed this (at times painful) memoir which begins with her childhood on Staten Island & NJ and leads you through her college years and on thru her life as a writer & performance artist in NY, concluding with her cancer diagnosis & death.

Jill Guccini says

My full review is up at the Lesbrary: <http://lesbrary.com/2013/01/21/jill-g...> Real good but real sad. Death is stupid.

Lisa Haas says

I have been a fan of Cheryl Burke for over a decade... this is an amazing story of how she pulled herself out of an overwhelmingly oppressive and abusive family of origin dynamic and realized her dream of becoming a writer. You know what? it is really funny, too.

Betsy Houston says

Three stars for the form, which is an unfortunate distraction from the content. The fact that the book was put together from disparate sources by Burke's friends after her death is no excuse for the sloppy editing that, in my opinion, is a bit of a dishonor to her memory and her legendary status in the NYC queer literary scene. Innumerable typos, tense fluctuations and narrative inconsistencies abound, taking away from the otherwise-engaging storyline.

Stephanie Schroeder says

My Awesome Place illuminates, in excruciating detail and with hilarious social commentary, the author's rise from the ashes of a bullying, dysfunctional family of origin and troubled young adulthood to darling of the 1990s spoken word scene. The writing is electric and edgy while her story is transfixing. A survivor of abuse and addiction both familial and self-inflicted, Cheryl B carried her wounds with her and used them to make/leave her mark on the queer literary scene --and the world. An incredible read!
