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The winners of the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for international reporting tell the astonishing story of Mary Clarke. At the age of fifty, Clarke left her comfortable life in suburban Los Angeles to follow a spiritual calling to care for the prisoners in one of Mexico's most notorious jails. She actually moved into a cell to live among drug king pins and petty thieves. She has led many of them through profound spiritual transformations in which they turned away from their lives of crime, and has deeply touched the lives of all who have witnessed the depth of her compassion. Donning a nun's habit, she became Mother Antonia, renowned as "the prison angel," and has now organized a new community of sisters—the Servants of the Eleventh Hour—widows and divorced women seeking new meaning in their lives. "We had never heard a story like hers," Jordan and Sullivan write, "a story of such powerful goodness." Born in Beverly Hills, Clarke was raised around the glamour of Hollywood and looked like a star herself, a beautiful blonde reminiscent of Grace Kelly. The choreographer Busby Berkeley spotted her at a restaurant and offered her a job, but Mary's dream was to be a happy wife and mother. She raised seven children, but her two unfulfilling marriages ended in divorce. Then in the late 1960s, in midlife, she began devoting herself to charity work, realizing she had an extraordinary talent for drumming up donations for the sick and poor.

On one charity mission across the Mexican border to the drug-trafficking capitol of Tijuana, she visited La Mesa prison and experienced an intense feeling that she had found her true life's work. As she recalls, "I felt like I had come home." Receiving the blessings of the Catholic Church for her mission, on March 19, 1977, at the age of fifty, she moved into a cell in La Mesa, sleeping on a bunk with female prisoners above and below her. Nearly twenty-eight years later she is still living in that cell, and the remarkable power of her spiritual counseling to the prisoners has become legendary.

The story of both one woman's profound journey of discovery and growth and of the deep spiritual awakenings she has called forth in so many lost souls, **The Prison Angel** is an astonishing testament to the powers of personal transformation.

The Prison Angel: Mother Antonia's Journey from Beverly Hills to a Life of Service in a Mexican Jail Details

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From Reader Review The Prison Angel: Mother Antonia's Journey from Beverly Hills to a Life of Service in a Mexican Jail for online ebook

Emily Heinkel says

This is one of those books that you finish and think on for another month or so. I am still processing the levels of surrender, service, patience and humility this woman showed to drug dealers and murderers and corrupt cops and judges.

She allowed and asked other people to help her in her ministry and opened her prisoners up to incredible opportunities. If our prison systems worked with this kind of rehabilitation in mind, I know our economy, justice system and communities would be much better off. Loved, loved, loved this book.

Shannon says

It's wonderful to read of such dedication to humanity. I'll never be a Mother Antonia, nor, in all honesty do I want to be. However, I hope her extreme compassion and willingness to seek light where darkness reigns seeps into my conscious and filters my perspective and reactions as I witness the inevitable ugly pieces of life.

Robyn says

I really enjoyed this book. It was especially pertinent to me since I read it as we left Mexico. This is a story about a woman who, after having raised 7 children, decides to devote her life to serving prisoners in Tijuana's largest prison. She actually moved in there and lives in a cell. She showed love to everyone at the prison from the prison guards who were brutally beating the inmates, to the inmates themselves who sometimes just needed someone to listen to the victims who needed to be able to forgive. I loved her message of trying to find good in everyone--drug dealers and murderers included--as well as the message that forgiving frees us and allows us to live our lives unencumbered by stifling emotional chains that can kill the soul.

The book ended with the idea that anyone can make a difference in the lives of others, "One day as she was making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to take to prisoners, she paused with a puzzled look on her face.

'You know,' she said, 'people think what I do is so extraordinary. But look at me, what am I doing? Anyone can do it. There are so many things people can do. It doesn't have to be enormous. It's the little things. Anyone can make a sandwich.'"

Leo Buijs says

An amazing story about some increadable 'good-doing' gringa in Tijuana Mexico. Okay, the writing is not the greatest, but it's not a novel, just a life story with lots of interviews at verbatim. For me this was of particular interest as anything related to Mexico for me is.

If you can read through the religious nonsense (apparently which seems to work for Sister Antonia) it is a fascinating revelation about life in a bad Mexican jale where she makes it a bit more barable for most.

I recommend it to anyone with interest in life in Mexico.

Julie Davis says

Reading this for my Catholic women's book club. An astounding story and very inspirational thus far.

FINAL

Interesting and inspirational. Definitely did a good job of making me look at my own life and not complain about the sacrifices I make or the undertakings I have going on for God. Could've been a bit more insightful into Mother Antonia's internal state. We are given a lot of actions but not so many circumstances where we see her own doubts, growth, or development once she is in full swing.

That said, I definitely can recommend it. And it's a quick read.

Emily says

I first heard about Mother Antonia in a New York Times article written about her shortly after her death in October 2013...Her story seemed completely unreal. A twice-divorced Catholic mother of seven from Beverly Hills, California, feels called to become a nun and serve the poor. When none of the religious communities will accept her because of her marital history and her age, she sews her own habit, moves to Mexico, plants herself in a cell in one of the most notorious prisons, and begins loving and serving those around her. Her presence and example prompt changes in prison administrators and guards as well as the prisoners and their families. Guards treat inmates with more dignity. Prison riots simply stop when she walks in to harm's way. People find hope again when a single person shows them kindness. Incredibly far-fetched, isn't it?

Mother Antonia might be one of the most real people who's ever lived.

Despite a fairly privileged upbringing, the woman born as Mary Clarke was aware of the poor and disadvantaged from a young age and often felt "a gnawing feeling inside her, a sense that there were important things she needed to do." In addition to raising her seven children, she threw herself into charity work, organizing contributions to be sent to war-torn Korea, running Christmas parties at children's hospitals, and opening her home to orphans on holidays. But after her second divorce, it just wasn't enough.

She had been visiting the La Mesa prison in Tijuana, Mexico, regularly for several years and "every time she left, she had the nagging feeling she was letting someone down, leaving behind someone who needed her." The prison warden had offered to let her stay overnight and so, after much prayer and thought and "wrestl[ing] with the idea" she decided to make the leap. Despite the fact that no religious order would accept her, she put on a homemade habit and moved to La Mesa. Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan report, "She blazed her own trail...She believed down to her toes that God had chosen this life for her and that He

had been shouting His plan to her for years."

To read the rest of this review, visit [Build Enough Bookshelves](#).

Angelea says

I had the opportunity to speak with Mother Antonia several times over the phone in the year or two before she died. Even by phone, she exuded peace, kindness, and love to the extreme. I had heard a bit about her life at the time and that a book had been written about her so, because the sound of her voice made such an impression on me, I was eager to learn more about her. The writing style and narration of the book were okay, but not great. I am still glad I read it and am inspired by her life's work.

David Christian says

An amazing book about Mother Antonia aka Mary Clarke who had everything in a beautiful California home with children but felt a calling and had a void in her soul. She felt empty/God had a plan for her. Giving up wealth and luxury she through hard work prayer and courage lived out her calling serving God and poor in one of Mexico's most notorious prisons. Her story defines self giving and sacrifice/what she achieved was amazing. This was an amazing story about an amazing woman. The Lord has his ways. You will enjoy this read. God Bless.

Lindquistheather says

What an amazing true story of a woman who left her comfortable life in Beverly Hills to live in a Tijuana prison. She dedicated her life to helping those that others felt didn't deserve help. I gave it 4 stars because of Mother Antonia's remarkable life, not because of the writing.

Debbie Jacob says

A very enjoyable read filled with inspiring anecdotes that aren't sappy about a remarkable well-to-do woman who gave up her life to do social work in a Tijuana prison. Because she was divorced, she couldn't be a "real" nun, but she was sanctioned to wear a habit associated with nuns who do social work. The story succeeds because it shows her as an ordinary person -- not a saint.

Mary Alice says

Well, this was a pleasant surprise. This woman has had an incredible journey. Raised in an affluent Beverly Hills family, and well off herself, later in life she found herself searching for a deeper meaning to her existence. She had gone through two failed marriages and had seven kids. Her father had instilled in her an affinity for helping the poor. When she was 50 (and her kids were grown) she became a Catholic nun and

moved into one of Mexico's worst (and nightmarish) prisons to help the inmates and their families. She had already been volunteering her services on a part time basis before deciding to make it her life's work, so she knew what she was getting into. She chose to live in a cell right along side the other inmates. She stepped in between guards and prisoners during riots. She ministered to the richest drug dealers and the poorest innocent inmates. She forgave, and ministered to, the worst murderers (some of whom murdered her friends) while at the same time comforting the victims families. She stood up to guards when they were brutally beating prisoners. She would get down on her knees and beg them to stop and they usually did stop. She walked straight through bullets flying; the inmates and guards would drop their weapons upon seeing her. It was interesting reading what her children thought of her decision to live this life. You would expect they would not approve. But they felt this was who their mother was meant to be and that it made perfect sense. This is a story of how God can turn bad into good when you possess sincerity and a heart that only wants to put God before others and do His will and not your own.

Mother Antonia is still alive. And I believe is still living in the prison. I need to do a little more internet research to find out her whereabouts. She was asked to create an order of nuns so that her work will continue. Here is info from the nuns' website--

The Eudist Servants Of The Eleventh Hour is a new branch, a twig sprouting on the 400 year-old tree of the extended spiritual family of St. John Eudes, whose strong branches include the Congregation Of The Sisters Of Our Lady Of Charity, our Eudist sisters, and the Congregation Of Jesus And Mary, our Eudist priests. Both of these orders were founded by Saint John Eudes, close friend of Saint Vincent de Paul, in the early 17th century. The Eudist Servants Of The Eleventh Hour is an association of the faithful whose members are sisters who are mature women who love Jesus and want to follow Him by serving the poor and the needy. The Eleventh Hour refers to the scripture where Jesus calls the last, and signifies that the community is for older women, generally between the ages of forty five and sixty five. The reference to St. John Eudes is recognition that the community is part of the Eudist Congregation, and it is also in honor of St. John Eudes spirituality. In 2003 the Eudist Servants Of The Eleventh Hour community was formally accepted by Bishop Rafael Romo Munoz of Tijuana, Mexico. The community's mission is to minister to the poor and the needy, to bring to them the love of Jesus Christ. To accomplish this members must, in their hearts and in their lives, bear the pain of the poor, the imprisoned, the sick, the rejected, the forgotten and the abandoned children of God. Members of the community serve, with the permission of the local Bishop, in a variety of locations in Mexico and the United States, and perform a variety of services. Mother Antonia Brenner, the Servants founder and current superior of the community, serves by ministering to prisoners and guards at a prison in Tijuana, Mexico. Several other sisters work alongside her in Tijuana. Sister Kathleen serves her ministry in Baton Rouge and Lafayette, Louisiana as a prison chaplain. Still another Servant, Sister Lillian, serves in her home area of Texas, tending to the elderly in nursing homes.

The Servants operate a ministry center, Casa Campos de San Miguel, located just three blocks from the La Mesa penitentiary. The Casa is a refuge for women leaving prison and for women visiting incarcerated family in the nearby prison, and also for women and children who have come to Tijuana for treatment for cancer. The sisters also have a convent nearby, Corazon de Maria, which serves as the community headquarters and is also a residence for some of the sisters in Tijuana. Corazon de Maria is also used as the community's house of formation. Still other sisters and associates live in the United States and commute daily to Tijuana to visit area hospitals and comfort patients and their families.

All of the sisters are self-supporting, both economically and with their own health care. Vows are taken for a one year period and then renewed annually, if mutually agreeable.

<http://eudistservants.org/site/index.php>

Lona says

I am probably not the best person to rate this book. I found it interesting at first, and I believe Sister Antonia was a unbelievably wonderful, saintly woman. However, when I got to page 175 I was getting bored with all the stories about the drug cartel etc. I started scanning pages until the last chapter, which I did read, to finish the book.

Irene says

The story of Mother Antonia deserves 6 stars. The writing that told it deserves 2.5 stars. This is the story of a Beverly Hills socialite, twice divorced mother of five who left everything behind to serve the despised criminals in deplorable conditions in a Tijuana prison. Her compassion for every person, infectious joy, tireless service, ability to reconcile enemies and passionate concern for the abused and neglected is quite an inspiration. This woman is certainly a saint.

Wilson says

A Mother to the Poor

I chose this rating based on the life of a woman who willingly and tirelessly gave of herself. At a time where many find despair, isolation, lack of tolerance and unrest - this book mothers the giving spirit that unites us all.

Heather Edwards says

Her biography is so engrossing I read the first 158 pages before I realized it was 2:30 in the morning and I was exhausted. I resented having to stop reading to go to sleep.

But the writing itself is merely a vehicle for her story. And perhaps the writing should be underwhelming so the words do not eclipse the woman.

<https://medium.com/@heathermedwards/t...>
