

Twin Voices: A Memoir of Polio, the Forgotten Killer

Janice Flood Nichols

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Reviewed by April Sullivan for Reader Views (1/08)

“Twin Voices” is a memoir by Janice Flood Nichols about a specific life-changing event. In the fall of 1953, at the age of six, she lost her twin brother to polio. Janice contracted polio as well. She survived and overcame temporary paralysis. She went on to become a rehabilitation counselor. While her experiences as a youth shaped her adult life, she never thought that fifty years later she would be writing about the experience.

Most people alive today have some memory of, or have at least heard of polio. Yet, to the surprise of everyone who has not kept up with polio research, including Janice Flood Nichols, polio is still an epidemic in Third World Countries. Although vaccines are available and worldwide eradication is possible, funding and education are needed to make this a reality. Knowing first-hand the devastation of polio, Janice was compelled to tell her story in an effort to educate and do her part to eradicate this deadly disease.

“Twin Voices” is structured in a unique way. Janice invited professionals, friends, and family members to lend their voices to the story. Each chapter is by one of many characters, including those who are no longer alive, such as her twin Frankie and her parents. Other characters include the doctor who signed Frankie’s death certificate, childhood friends, aunts, and cousins. Not only do the voices tell the personal side of the story, they also tell the history and facts about polio. The combination forms a nicely balanced book.

I applaud Janice for writing this book. It was obviously not easy. But she was able to bring a perspective to the subject that not many people can. Janice knows polio as both a victim and a survivor. When Frankie died, a part of Janice died. Yet, on the other hand, when Janice survived, a part of Frankie survived, and this book is tangible evidence of that. “Twin Voices” is about so much more than polio. It is about the unique quality of twindom that Janice writes about so eloquently. Being a twin myself, that is the part about this book that intrigued me. Being educated about polio was an added bonus.

I recommend “Twin Voices” to anyone who wants to read a well-researched book and touching personal look at the polio epidemic.