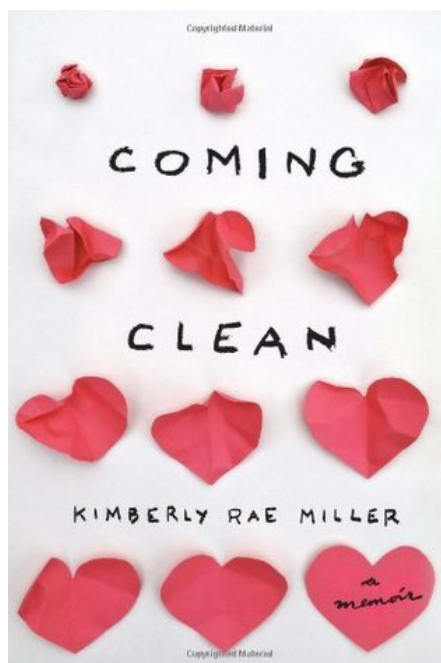




Coming Clean

Kimberly Rae Miller

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Coming Clean

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Coming Clean Kimberly Rae Miller

Kim Miller is an immaculately put-together woman with a great career, a loving boyfriend, and a tidy apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side. You would never guess that Kim grew up behind the closed doors of her family's idyllic Long Island house, navigating between teetering stacks of aging newspapers, broken computers, and boxes upon boxes of unused junk festering in every room ? the product of her father's painful and unending struggle with hoarding. In this moving coming-of-age story, Kim brings to life her rat-infested home, her childhood consumed by concealing her father's shameful secret from friends, and the emotional burden that ultimately led to an attempt to take her own life. And in beautiful prose, Miller sheds light on her complicated yet loving relationship with her parents that has thrived in spite of the odds. Coming Clean is a story about recognizing where we come from and the relationships that define us ? and about finding peace in the homes we make for ourselves.

Coming Clean Details

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From Reader Review Coming Clean for online ebook

Kelly Butcher says

I snatched this book up at the library yesterday, hoping to finally read a book that I could relate to. I have never really told anyone- except my husband and his family (and they will never know how bad it really was), but I grew up in the house of a hoarder. In the eighties, we didn't have a name for it as Kimberly writes. In the eighties, it was just the way we were. I could relate viscerally to her descriptions of her life in her filthy house. This book brought back my experiences vividly- gut wrenchingly. Children of hoarders suffer their own brand of post traumatic stress disorder and this book triggered it for me.

My experiences were very much like hers- not being able to eat because the kitchen was full of rotting food, covered in maggots and sludge. Kim never mentioned roaches at her house- and I don't know how she didn't have them. (we did and it was mortifying) We also had mice- who got very brave and would climb into bed with me at night so I had to sleep with a hood up and blankets around my face. I too never had sleepovers and knew just how to open the front door so people wouldn't see in. We had to be good in school so nobody ever came to our house to check on us. I know our neighbors all hated us- we got anonymous notes telling us to clean our yard and garage- as well as offers to help. We had our share of pipe and plumbing disrepair that we couldn't let anyone in to fix- but her plumbing situation was more dire than mine, I always had clean water and a toilet to use. In high school, I bought my own mini fridge and microwave so I could have access to clean food (which I also bought). I started going to a laundromat so I could have clean clothes too. Like Kim, my father had health issues and had to be brought home to the house. My siblings and I would clean for his homecoming and it would be back to filth in weeks. We always threw away the wrong thing, did it wrong, didn't do it right, didn't do enough... so we eventually gave up trying to help.

If it weren't for a few close friends in high school who let me spend weeks at their house (Denise R is at the top!) I don't know what I would have done. Once I started dating my boyfriend, (now husband) I had a place to escape but my mother never understood why I didn't want to be at home and she made me feel so guilty about it. Hoarders don't see their mess like healthy people do. They are either use to it, they are blind to it, or it comforts them. Kim was a much better daughter than I was- I got the hell out of there as soon as I could and I never went back- ever. Not to the people or the place. I have also suffered nightmares like Kim- I haven't had one for a long, long time, but last night after finishing this book, I couldn't sleep as I was replaying my experiences.

I may go back and delete this entire review- but it feels good to finally get it off my chest.

Willow says

Kimberly Rae Miller has had a dark family secret that she has spent most of her life trying to keep it hidden. Her parents are hoarders.

Miller describes her dad as a dotty, sweet man who goes around trying to collect information whether it's listening to news on the radio constantly or picking up every little piece of paper with writing on it, putting it into bags, and storing it into the closet.

Since my dad is a hoarder too, I can relate. Unlike Miller though, I'm probably not as generous to my dad. It's hard to deal with someone who never takes responsibility for their own crap, expects the world to clean up after them, and never pulled their head out of his ass long enough to consider their family.

Yet hoarding is a mental illness. I read one review for this book that condemned Miller for cleaning up her

parent's mess, calling her an enabler. Hoarding isn't quite like substance abuse though. It's not like hoarders are going to reach their bottom and then suddenly have an epiphany about cleaning up their act. My dad's compulsion to be a packrat is ingrained in his psyche. He simply cannot stand to throw anything away. You can see it in his eyes. Fortunately he traveled a lot when I was growing up, so my mom would start chucking stuff in the trash after he left. She was a cleaning dynamo, containing my dad's little obsession. Our house was tidy. For years though my dad complained about it (even after they divorced) saying she threw valuable treasures away.

Poor Miller's mom was not quite as efficient as mine though. I felt so sorry for her. Born with scoliosis, Miller's mom was disfigured because her parents refused to get her a brace when she was growing up. Consequently her spine was a gnarled mess by the time she was an adult, her 5'8 frame only growing to 4'9. When Kimberly was still a little girl, her mom went and had major surgery to try to correct this, only to find that her twisted bones had fused together. The poor woman was bed ridden, and trapped in a house that was slowly becoming a landfill. To battle her depression, she became a TV shopaholic, buying endless items that piled up with the loads of junk.

Miller describes her home as *the bottom of a garbage can. Soggy junk filled our living space*. When she was fourteen the boiler broke and they couldn't let a repairman come in to fix it. Then the pipes started to decay, which caused flooding.

The downstairs had become a relative swamp ground. It never seemed to dry out from the flooding, so when we did walk through it, the inches of trash would squish beneath our feet, creating an unsteady terrain. The living room, dining room, and den – spaces I thought my father would never find enough things to fill – had floor-to-ceiling piles of boxes and bags of paper and knickknacks, things that had been purchased and put down and long forgotten. We gave up the kitchen and survived solely on fast food and hermetically sealed snacks we could keep in our bedroom.

Miller says she lived with fleas in the summer, froze in the winter, and had to join a gym to take a shower. All her clothes were bought new because they never washed the old ones. Once after moving, they discovered a homeless man had been living in their attic. And here they thought the noises were only rats. Miller describes growing up surrounded by trash, vivid and cringe worthy. Yet through it all, Miller loves her parents, and I could feel the warmth.

Yet I couldn't help but think that Miller has written her memoir too soon. Her battle with her hoarder parents is far from over. She may feel differently about all this when she reaches forty and is stuck with elderly, hoarder parents. I didn't really become angry with my father until I hit forty. Somehow that twenty-year-old optimism starts to fade when you find yourself middle-aged and still having 'bedbug nightmares', still dealing with hoarder destruction, and still dealing with the fact that they have never cleaned up a damn thing in their whole entire life. It's a mental illness, but it causes a deep and pounding rage.

Julia Roller says

I'm sure many other reviewers will also compare this book to *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, for its portrayal of a resilient daughter growing up with intelligent but troubled parents. Both books are great reads. Kimberly Rae Miller's book is so easy to read that you can almost forget at times how troubling her story is--born to loving parents who were also chronic hoarders. Her dad collected paper and broken parts of just about everything, and her mom, who seemed to become a hoarder as a kind of reaction to her husband's habits, collected newly purchased and rarely opened items.

I found one early scene particularly poignant, when Miller's father responded to his young daughter's request to watch TV while she ate breakfast at the kitchen table by getting a pile of mirrors from his garage stash and carefully placing them throughout the kitchen and living room to create a reflection of the TV set for her. Through little glimpses like these, Miller offers some true insight into why some people collect things others consider junk, and their firm belief that each item has some potential use.

But despite the love and intentions of her parents, the conditions the author had to live in were truly terrible. The most heart-breaking part was the tremendous responsibility placed on her shoulders. Even as an adult she had to return home regularly to keep her parents' living space under control.

The fact that she spent so much of her life trying to hide the situation makes it clear it took a lot of courage for the author to write this book. And it is a worthwhile read, for the compelling insights she offers into a behavior that is very hard to understand and for the inspiring story of her own resiliency.

Julie says

This book contains 254 pages of some of the most blatant self-aggrandizement I've ever read. It's a memoir, *supposedly*, about one woman's experience of growing up with a hoarder father and a compulsive shopper mother, but, *really* it's a story about Kimberly Rae Miller, her exceptional beauty, her career as an actress, and her amazing website.

At 254 pages, the book is approximately 100 pages too long, and, though Ms. Miller tells her readers that she's "a comedienne and a writer," her story is not the least bit humorous, and the unedited minutiae contained within this tedious read is almost staggering to me.

Throughout the entire book I kept asking myself two questions: *Why am I still reading this?* And, *How did this get published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt??*

"K-Rae," or "Kimmie," as her parents call her (still, in her 30s, by her Mamala and Daddy) tells us, fairly early on, that "we weren't the kind of people that good things happened to."

Um. . . Not true. Not true at all. It was her *parents* who had the heavy-duty stories, lives filled with abuse, alcoholism, head injuries, extremely challenging medical problems and embarrassing obsessive-compulsive behaviors.

"Kimmie," at least from where I sat while reading this, had the misfortune of living in a grotesquely unhealthy house and weird parents, but beyond that, she also possessed the obsessive love and interest of her mother and father and almost breathtaking opportunities throughout her young life that most of us will never have in an entire lifetime.

The book starts with a very flattering photo of 9-year-old Kimmie, and ends with a glamour shot photo of Kimmie from the current day. And, even though the book is dedicated to her parents and ends with gratitude expressed toward her parents in the Acknowledgments, believe me, this book is all about Kim.

Her name, in some form: Kimberly, Kim, Kimmie, K-Rae and Kiddo appears on approximately every second page. Kimmie confides in us that:

I was lucky: Instead of acne, puberty had brought with it dry skin and dry hair. I could go a week without washing my hair and still look presentable. Rubbing alcohol and cotton balls sufficed for spot hygiene maintenance to keep body odor under control.

And:

My mother always told me how lucky I was to have black eyelashes. Hers were blond and took a great deal of mascara to become visible. I wouldn't need makeup like she did—she had ordered all my parts before I was born, she said. Her skin, Daddy's hair and straight back, Grandma's nose, and Grandpa's cleft chin. I turned out almost exactly as she'd planned, except for my legs--

I honestly don't know how I finished the book. I have bronchitis, so I think it was just an old fashioned lack of ambition to go through the trouble of abandoning it and finding another.

You may wonder. . . did you learn anything new about brain injuries, hoarding or compulsive shopping? Er, no.

Did you crack up laughing, David Sedaris style, at this read? Er, no.

Did you feel like this made you a better person or did you connect to the material?

No and no.

To be honest, the only thing that makes this a 3 star read (and not lower) for me is the mother, Nora. Though she is not well-developed as a “character,” she has some fantastic one-liners in this read.

Some examples of Mom's quick quips:

“Listen to what people mean, not what they say.”

“We don't have to talk about everything that's true.”

“I've settled for so much in my life because I didn't think I was worth anything.”

What I kept wondering was. . . where's Mom's book? And, if there is one, can I trade?

Topaz Mckenzie says

I've been following Kimberly Rae Miller's healthy lifestyle blog "The Kim Challenge" for a few years and I've enjoyed her meal updates and witty banter on exercise videos and love.

I thought "Coming Clean" would be an extension of her blog and as I started to flip the pages I soon discovered it was anything but. I've watched "Hoarders" and have turned my nose at the filth and chaos these people lived in. This is why "Coming Clean" rocked me to the core and brought up my own personal issues with holding on to things that served no benefit to my life. Kim's take on her childhood and loving her parents throughout their emotional and physical baggage, gave light to the often lost stories of those who take care of parents with mental health challenges.

It's a story of perseverance and determination as one often succumbs to family discord and seeks to blame childhood issues and setbacks on why they can't or wasn't given the tools to achieve. Kim is a testament that life can and will get better when one stops living in guilt and comes clean about their life.

I wasn't emotionally prepared for this book and that's exactly why I needed it. Kim has given me courage to rifle through my childhood, pick away at heaps of emotional keepsakes, throw away what doesn't work and take what can be fixed or mended and soar.

This isn't only the story of a hoarders child but a coming of age story that will stay with you long after you've finished the book and I believe it's the modern woman's new "She's Come Undone."

Alice 📚 says

Great

4/5 ? This was a really well written memoir and I enjoyed it a lot, especially the epilogue. The end.

Julie Ehlers says

Coming Clean was fascinating in exactly the way I'm always going to find hoarding stories fascinating. However, the writing was nothing special—generally competent, but with more than its fair share of awkward sentences. I also can't say that I felt anything while reading except for shock at some of the details about the hoarding, so the overall emotional impact was low. It gets three stars from me instead of two because it was a genuine page-turner, but if you're not particularly interested in the topic of hoarding there's really no other reason to pick this up.

Carmen says

As a little girl, I used to lie in bed, thinking Maybe if I endure all my pain now, I could be happy when I am older. Emerson felt like my reward for the years of shame I'd logged.

This is a memoir about a woman whose father was a hoarder. It is relatively light, uplifting, and loving - which can sometimes be missing from hoarding memoirs.

Miller loves her parents deeply. Her parents are funny, sweet, attentive, encouraging, and kind. This really shows in the novel and is something Miller stresses hard in order to not make the whole book a focus on what misery she was put through being the daughter of a hoarder.

And things were really bad. No hot water, their pipes were busted. The house was full of wet garbage. Fleas, rats, someone living in their attic for YEARS that no one had ever noticed - Miller now suffers from PTSD because of her childhood.

Another interesting thing to note is Miller's obsession about cleanliness. She lives in a spotless and minimal apartment. Sometimes she does stuff like sprays her (perfectly clean) mattress with bug spray and disinfectant before she goes to sleep. She throws away even stuff that is important to her because she's so terrified of clutter.

MY PERSONAL THOUGHTS

The backlash against hoarding can be almost as damaging as the hoarding. I'm convinced that in 20 years we are going to read "My mom/dad was a child of a hoarder" memoirs in which children describe growing up with parents so obsessed with cleanliness that it is damaging. A woman I know whose mom was a hoarder throws everything away. She sneaks into her child's room at night and throws her toys and dolls into the trash. She can't stand having a surface that is not clean (desks, tables - clean as in "completely clear of any items on the surface"). I seriously think she's damaging her kid to some extent with her obsession with minimalism.

I also want to mention that if you are the kind of person to self-diagnose, this is NOT the book for you. I actually know IRL people who have read this book and then done massive purges on their house. Is this a bad thing? Um, you decide. I'm just saying, this book is going to make you itch to give your house a thorough deep cleaning.

The last thing I want to mention is a note on class differences. It's easy for richer people to have zero clutter and to live a minimalist lifestyle. It's harder for poor people to let things go. This isn't hoarding, it's a legitimate response to not wanting to throw away something useful because you can't afford new stuff. Save it because you might need it. There's a difference between hoarding and being frugal and cautious. Signs of hoarding are stuff like:

- can't bear to throw anything away, attachment to worthless items
- saves garbage
- your home is unlivable
- you can't walk in certain rooms or parts of your house
- old food, rot, mildew, dirty dishes
- social isolation due to shame

So please don't think you are a hoarder or accuse people of hoarding if they are just frugal, poor, or have lived through the Depression. This is NOT the same thing. Everyone has clutter in their lives, everyone accumulates stuff. I think the "hoarding" term is thrown around a lot lately, but there's a huge difference (HUGE) between having a messy house

As Roseanne would say, "Excuse the mess, but we live here."

and someone who has the disease, the mental illness, of hoarding. Your house with your spouse and your four kids is NOT going to look like Martha Stewart's *Living* magazine. Nor should it.

Miller refuses to watch hoarding shows because they are exploitative. I also cannot stomach them, especially when animals are involved.

When I came across the many shows about hoarders, I would promptly change the channel. I couldn't even stand to watch commercials for them. I imagined casting directors scouring piles of applications from those so desperate for help they would willingly exploit themselves and their families, for those they believed would have the most outrageous stash or spectacular nervous breakdown on the front lawn.

There IS animal hoarding in this book and animals DO die. Please be advised if this is something that upsets you.

Tl;dr - This book is great. Warm, loving, affectionate - Miller makes sure to show her parents as people first and her dad's mental illness as second. We are not our diagnoses. It's important to remember that.

And Miller can be genuinely funny, as when she relates the tale of how her parents were called in because she was frequently excusing herself from kindergarten to masturbate in the bathroom. Her mom is quick to set the teacher straight.

"She's not masturbating. She's robbing you."

...

My logic was simple. If I put something that I wanted in my underpants, even if I was caught, I'd be allowed to keep it. It had my vagina germs on it.

Miller's warm and funny attitude helps to offset the very real horrors of her childhood and the current problems of dealing with her PTSD and trying to deal with her aging parents who are extra endangered due to their living environment.

This is not a research-based book like *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things*, it's more of a personal memoir. I enjoyed reading it and I enjoyed the human face Miller puts on hoarding, instead of focusing on "this is disgusting, how can people live like this," etc. etc. that is usually emphasized. A satisfying and down-to-earth book.

Dawn Edgar says

This book offers a factual account of what it is like as a child growing up with parents who are hoarders. Made me very interested in the topic of hoarding and why people do it; I actually researched it a little while reading this book. My conclusions are mostly because they are a little bit ADHD, OCD, easily overwhelmed, messed up in the head and...lazy? The editors of the DSM are looking to include hoarding as a personality disorder. The way Miller writes her parents, there is definitely something disturbing going on, and while her parents demonstrate varying levels of awareness, it does not seem to be bothering them much or rendering them uncomfortable.

Growing up like this is, on the other hand, extremely disturbing to our author and she shares very detailed struggles she faces as she tries to compensate and care for her parents. While her love for her parents is ever-present and magnanimous (almost to the point of sugar-coating the deeper, more disturbing issues of raising their only child in squalor), she wishes they would just tidy up and stop depending on her to do it for them, even after she has left home. This made me question how far I would go to appease parents that don't seem to care for themselves or, really, for me. While Miller is angry, she still meets their beck and call, and keeps getting angrier...which leads me to the thought that there could be a rest of the story later on as they all grow older.

The book/writing itself has troubles. The tenses change often. I don't think that should be allowed just because of its genre. There is one major part that appears completely unedited, with Miller's rambling thoughts (perhaps after a few glasses of sangria), that she has difficulty shaping into some semblance of her true beliefs. Moreover, Miller holds back. Because her parents are both still alive and relatively well, she tries to be as honest as possible, but we do not get the darker side of the picture because she is still annoyingly trying to please them and demonstrate her hard story with a light touch that doesn't work. Her early descriptions of herself being precious and precocious as a child hit the reader way too hard over the head--okay, we get it, you were cute and smart. The list fashion her story is told..." and then we and then I and then they..." helps us know she was not sure what to leave out and keep in. This makes the book rather ineffective as a memoir into the true depths of hoarding hell. I don't understand what was going through her mind as she tried taking her life and I am not sure she does either. She knows it is bad, though. I don't understand why her parents do what they do. I know it is bad, though. Because she said so.

While this memoir (which seems almost self-published/edited) touches on important issues, it gives us little to go on, revealing a startling lack of insight on behalf of the author, who never notably received any therapeutic help, herself, as part of being a victim in a hoarding household. Part contrived as a fact-based expose, the writing is simply going through the motions. It may have been better to keep it under wraps as her personal story/journal than to expose it to the world without more emotive depth, until there is a deeper, even more painful (but honest) story to tell.

Incidentally, there is a creepy, creepy part that sticks with one after finding it out. If it were me, I would have

started there and built my story around it with some added drama and tension...maybe in novel form. For what it's worth.

abby says

For a book about a child growing up in a hoarding environment, I found this to be surprisingly tragic. Like many others, I'm addicted the popular tv shows that feature, and some might argue exploit, this mental health issue. If you look around online, it's not hard to find articles and forum comments that are very judgmental, and often times vicious, toward the people who appear on these shows. It's not uncommon for viewers to suggest that watching *Hoarders* is inspiration to clean their own homes. It's easy to forget that these are human beings-- not motivational tools.

Kimberly Rae Miller puts a very human face on the issue of hoarding. Her father has no memories of his childhood, at all. His parents were hard-core alcoholics and whatever happened to him in his youth was protectively erased by his brain. Her mother grew up unloved by neglectful parents. She suffers with an extreme spinal condition because her parent's couldn't be bothered to get her a back brace as a child. Kimberly's father starts as the catalyst for the hoarding situation. He's fond of papers, any paper, and radios. Their house quickly fills of them. Her mother is angry at the mess, but also ultimately resigned to it. She eventually becomes a compulsive shopper who adds to the hoard.

The hoard slowly takes over the family's life. Their first house burns down in a fire, spurred on by the mounds of paper, killing all the family pets. Her parents separate for a time, partly to keep CPS from discovering their true living conditions. The boiler explodes, and they have to start taking weekly showers at a local gym. Then they discover a surprise living in their attic, the reveal of which literally had me screeching at my Kindle.

This is a very well-written memoir, better than many I've read from professional writers. The author is likable and down to earth. I think some people will be confused, maybe even put off, by her forgiving nature to her parents. But I get it. My interest in hoarding actually comes from my husband's family-- both he and his mother have hoarding tendencies. Yet, I grew up in a dysfunctional environment, and I could relate to every inner struggle with her parents. I wish her the best of luck going forward and dealing with her parents as they continue to age.

~☆~Dāni(ela) ♥ ?? love & semi-colons~☆~ says

3.5 stars

This review had to wait because I had to disinfect my house. Serious Lysol action, people, because this:

Is NOT OK.

I'm the flipside of a hoarder. I scrub my tile with a toothbrush. I've probably traumatized my children forever by saving only their best school/craft projects (and only then in digital format) and throwing out the rest. I can't abide knick-knacks. I threw away my high school year books (who needs those as a reminder of claw

bangs and bad perms?). I don't have a particular attachment to stuff. It's just that: stuff, objects, not important.

But hoarders don't see it that way, and thanks to reality TV, people can feed their sick fascination with those who hoard.

Kimberly Miller survived a childhood with two hoarding parents. Her dad, the child of two alcoholics, is the main culprit, stocking away piles of paper, gadgets, broken electronics, random parts. But Miller's mom is no help; suffering from severe scoliosis and often bedridden, her mom is a compulsive shopper, stashing box after unopened box of crap from QVC in the hallway, living room, and every other available surface. As a child, Kimberly was so ashamed of living the way she did, she has a "decoy" house that she used as a drop-off spot.

This book is not an expose of hoarders, nor is it a clinical analysis of the disease. It's simply a story of one girl and her hoarding parents. The hoarding at the Miller house got so bad, Kim slept with fleas and rats, a squatter in her attic (there was so much shit up there, no one knew it was occupied). One of her childhood houses burned down thanks to all the broken electrical appliances (killing all the family pets), and another was basically condemned. At one point, the furnace broke, but the family couldn't let anyone see how they lived, so it went unfixed all winter long, leaving young Kim without heat or hot showers. She would crawl through feces to get from room to room. Mold and bugs took over.

But despite all this, Miller spends much of the book defending her parents and bailing them out time and time again. As a child, she was powerless, but as an adult she becomes an enabler, spending all her free time cleaning the multiple apartments her parents trash, helping them move over and over, making excuses for them, and roping her friends into days of clean-up duty. She cleans up their mess (literally and figuratively) without ever saying, Enough, you need to get some help (she sort of says this at the end, but you can tell she doesn't mean it).

I was so incredibly frustrated with Miller's parents AND Miller herself by the end of the book, I wanted to pound my head against a hard surface. I get that they're her parents and she loves them, but saying that they were good parents just messier than most is like saying that Kim Il-Sung was a good leader, only more controlling.

Kim, honey, forcing you to live in a rat- and flea-infested house where you could see maybe a square inch of the floor, having to throw out your clothes because you couldn't find them to wash them, and eating fast food for every meal because there was no space in the kitchen to cook isn't just kooky parenting.

It's fucking CHILD ABUSE.

There, ok, I feel better now.

I got really tired of Kim defending her parents (even as she suffers from debilitating nightmares and starts breaking out in hives) instead of forcing them to get real help. I know it's not easy, but there's therapy, meds, behavior modification - SOMETHING. I'm glad you wrote a book about your life, Kim. Now call a psychiatrist and cut your parents off pronto.

Lori says

I'm not the type of reviewer that gives a "book report" synopsis of a book that you might be about to read; I/you can get that in the publisher's comments. What I would like to tell you, however, is that *Coming Clean* is one of the most honest books I've ever read. While reading, I never felt that Kim was trying too hard to steer her story to include more drama or to shock you into feeling sorry for her. Her story was real; heartbreaking at times, heartwarming at other times and true to the title, it just felt like it was time to let it all out. I feel a little honored to have read this book, I feel like I may, in some way, be a part of someone's healing process. Kim spent so many years growing up worrying what others may think of her life that she concocted new personas that she felt would be more accepted. Now she's opened the world up to who she really is, who and where she came from, and how she came to be the woman that she is today; not in spite of it all, but because of it all, and more importantly with no regrets. I can't imagine the courage it must have taken to put pen to paper and essentially rub raw old wounds. I think that anyone who reads this book, whether having known/lived with a hoarder, or even, like me, an alcoholic, will identify with Kim or her story at some level.

Laurel-Rain says

Growing up as the child of severe hoarders, the author of "*Coming Clean: A Memoir*" describes in great detail what that was like for her.

In her narrative voice that felt like a conversation, she revealed how her home was not just an embarrassment that she had to keep secret, but that sometimes the house was festering with the detritus of the clutter until pipes burst, mold grew, rats proliferated throughout, and at one time, a homeless person was living in their attic, unbeknownst to them.

One side effect for the author was how socially isolated she was....and I felt such compassion as I read about how she found a way to role play the kind of person she wanted to be through acting, and even by emulating those whose behavior she wanted to incorporate into her own.

Health problems made it imperative for long term changes in the living conditions, but after cleaning up repeatedly over the years, moving her parents to new places, and even hiring people to clean....none of these actions solved the problem permanently. At that point, Miller began researching the condition of hoarding and learned a lot about the childhoods of those with the condition.

Now a successful writer and actress living in Manhattan, Miller describes honestly and with great understanding of herself and her parents the small changes that have occurred over the years...perhaps because she finally detached. She was also able to create her own nest and develop a relationship that was satisfying for her. One point she emphasized: no matter how frustrated and angry she occasionally got with her parents, she always loved them and knew that they loved her. In many ways, the bond between them grew despite the horrific events of their lives together. Five stars.

Barbara says

Hmmm.

I really wanted to like this book because the topic of extreme hoarding fascinates me. How does one grow up

in a filthy, dangerous environment and survive intact? Unfortunately, the writing and tone felt inconsistent and, therefore confusing. Here's an example: The author states clearly that her family cannot afford the tuition increase at her college and will need to drop out. In the next chapter her mother is sending her to the college's summer program abroad(!).

No explanation.

At many points throughout the book, the author seems to be apologizing for her parent's hoarding behavior, backpedaling on her anger towards her dad's abuse and detachment and giving a multitude of excuses. This leads me to question the point of the book. If this is a form of therapy for the author, I don't think she's finished examining the situation and her complex feelings about it. It was also infuriating to read how she continued to clean up her parent's house...over and over...even though each time they promised to keep it neat and then failed. IMO, the author is just as screwed up as her parents in terms of her deluded perceptions of people and situations. But...maybe that's the whole point?

Jay Warner says

This book was recommended to me by the Children of Hoarders group. Since I am the child of a hoarder, I was interested to see how Miller's experiences compared to mine and how she dealt with growing up in a hoarded home. I found her style easy to read and finished the book quickly. Her descriptions of walking on stacks of slick papers and not wanting her friends to know where she lived were particularly vivid.

Sometimes I felt she tried to rationalize and justify her parents' behavior but I also found that rationalization a very familiar trait with children of hoarders. I would highly recommend this book to anyone dealing with this issue or wanting to understand. It's not all like the television show and the perspective of the child is different than the perspective of an outsider or the hoarder. Miller is very brave to tackle this very personal issue in a book that is at once comforting and disturbing at the same time. Sadly, I relate very well to her statement that she felt her parents loved their stuff more than they loved her, and growing up with that feeling left her to struggle with self worth issues all her life.
