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Book reviews

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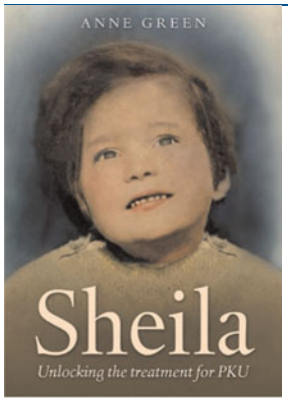

Sheila – Unlocking the Treatment for PKU

By Anne Green. Brewin Books. 2020. £12.95 (pb). 192 pp. ISBN: 9781858587141

As you open the pages of *Sheila*, consider the lives of Cameron, Taila, Louise and Tom, four young people whose phenylketonuria (PKU) was successfully treated at Birmingham Children's Hospital. One is a medical student; another reads theatre arts; the third entered the teaching profession and the fourth lectures at universities and creates films. They owe their health – and consequently, in some measure, their success – to Sheila Jones, her mother, Mary, and her clinicians, as expounded upon in this inspiring and emotionally charged text that explores the origins of the heel-prick test and the development of the low-phenylalanine diet that now treats PKU successfully.

Former consultant biochemist Professor Anne Green traces the life of the eponymous character, Sheila, who spent her initial years in an impoverished but loving home and it is here that we meet Mary, Sheila's mother, who insisted on investigation to determine the cause of her daughter's challenging behaviour. Her consequent diagnosis was one of the first in the UK, and in 1951, she was the first patient treated with an experimental diet that sought to treat the phenylalanine excess now recognised as a fundamental cause of PKU.

The tale then tours the experimental science and methodology of the clinicians involved in the development of the low-phenylalanine diet. With the diet's introduction providing some benefit to Sheila, we continue to see the tenacity of a determined mother to find a remedy for her daughter's condition, embarking on a gruelling weekly journey to the Children's Hospital and back home carrying Sheila and the two litre Winchester bottle containing the experimental diet.

The book expands on the earlier history of Birmingham Children's Hospital and on the early development of the PKU low-phenylalanine diet, explaining the science in an accessible way for the layperson, as well as clarifying the challenges involved in such processes. The book also outlines the continued development of treatments for PKU in the time since, and considers briefly recent developments of intellectual disability in-patient services.

Throughout all this, the central story remains clear – the tale of a girl born in poverty, living through difficulty, who with the love and determination of her mother and the efforts of professionals became a pioneer in developing the treatment for PKU, and enabling subsequent generations of people with PKU to live relatively normal lives since. This would be inspiring to medical undergraduates, psychiatric trainees, trainee biochemists and medical historians alike.

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I May Destroy You – an insight into living with post-traumatic stress disorder and recovery

This is a review of a multi-BAFTA award-winning television drama series called *I May Destroy You* (BBC, 2020) rather than a book review. It explores the pervasive effects of sexual violence. Following being raped, Arabella, the central character, experiences significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She frequently experiences distressing intrusive memories and flashbacks of the rape. She avoids the bar where she met the man who later raped her. Arabella also experiences significant hyperarousal: she finds sleeping difficult and finds it hard to concentrate. She becomes increasingly irritable. These three core symptoms of PTSD lead to significant functional impairment with her unable to write, losing her writing contract and arguing with friends. Although Arabella is offered some therapy, she does not really engage with this, and her symptoms and impairment worsen.

In common with many people with PTSD, Arabella does not just avoid places that remind her of the rape, she also avoids feelings and memories of it. This is powerfully demonstrated metaphorically when she throws her clothes (used in forensics as evidence) under her bed after retrieving them from the police. The narrative style helps us to appreciate Arabella's experiences of disorientation more, with strong visual imagery, the story jumping chronologically and replaying multiple versions of the same event. This is typified by one episode ending with Arabella trying to drown herself after feeling emotionally drowned followed two major rejections; then the next episode starts as if nothing happened. Has Arabella simply put memories of her suicide attempt 'under the bed'?

Following a difficult evening with friends, Arabella feels overwhelmed and reaches out to her therapist where they reach a breakthrough. The therapist listens to Arabella and draws an image on the paper between them. She discusses the separation Arabella seems to have between good and bad, Arabella and the night of her rape. She draws a line between A (for Arabella) and X (everything bad). Despite Arabella's efforts to keep the bad things 'under the bed', the therapist recognises that they still hurt her. Arabella takes the pen and combines the A, X and the line in between them into one image. Such a breakthrough represents a shift from the Kleinian schizoid to depressive position. She goes home and faces what is under her bed. This leads to significant healing for Arabella. Later, upon finishing her book, the cover shows the image she had created in therapy, reinstating the importance of that revelation.

This series portrays PTSD in a way that is powerfully informative to viewers. Viewers that may be trying to cope with trauma may recognise themselves in Arabella. They too may be trying to cope without help and unsuccessfully stuffing difficult feelings 'under their beds'. This series demonstrates how incredibly helpful therapy can be for PTSD, if we are prepared to open up and discuss what is so difficult for us. We hope that it has led to other 'Arabellas' seeking help and recovering.

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