



## Cleft Heart: Chasing Normal

*Karl Schonborn*

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## **Cleft Heart: Chasing Normal** Karl Schonborn

Karl Schonborn's silver tongue is locked away for years by a birth defect that makes his speech unclear and his face asymmetrical. Bullies target him for this and even for being restricted from PE and sports. But with courage, humor, and his family's love, he overcomes shame, handicaps, and personal losses that might have defeated others. Skilled doctors, speech therapists, and his own determination allow him a shot at his dream of becoming a debate star and attending an elite college. However, after various successes Schonborn must deal with reverses in his love life and worse--unspeakable tragedy in his family. Somehow, he survives, even thrives. Spanning the WWII '40s, the conformist '50s, and the revolutionary '60s, Schonborn's coming-of-age story recounts, among other things, his friendship with a famous folksinger, conscientious-objection to the Vietnam War, and an amazing around-the-world odyssey. His story, like the stories of the speech-challenged Greek orator Demosthenes and British King George VI, will have you crying and cheering at the same time. "A poignant, heartfelt tale of endurance and hope. Schonborn's story is an inspiration to all who endure physical or mental health challenges and those who care about them." U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry

## **Cleft Heart: Chasing Normal Details**

Date : Published August 29th 2013 by Wayman Publishing

ISBN : 9780989785020

Author : Karl Schonborn

Format : Paperback 380 pages

Genre : Nonfiction

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# From Reader Review Cleft Heart: Chasing Normal for online ebook

## Shari Larsen says

This is the amazing true story of Karl Schonborn, born in 1943 with a cleft palate, which made his face asymmetrical, and caused speech difficulties. Because of that, he was also the target of bullies while growing up. But with the help of doctors, surgeries, speech therapists, a dedicated mother, and his own determination, he overcomes those problems. Another problem he had to deal with was a heart defect, which was discovered just as he was finding acceptance among his peers through participating in sports.

Karl's hope is to be just "normal", and he not only achieves that, but he exceeds it; he worked to overcome his speech problems and became a debate star in high school and in college. He also decided to use what he learned from dealing with bullies to study how problems can be solved with nonviolence.

I really enjoyed this memoir; I wanted to cry when the bullies were so mean to him, and I cheered for him when he experienced victories. The only negative thing I have to say about this book is that the story slowed down a bit as he described a trip of backpacking and hitchhiking around the world, but I admired his courage to take on such an experience alone. Even for someone without health issues, that was a very brave thing to take on back then, back when there were no cell phones to call for help if you got into trouble or became stranded somewhere.

It was heartbreaking to read about his experiences with bullying, as I was bullied myself as a child, but I loved how he had the courage to stand up to them, something I never did. I wondered while I was reading his story, if his former bullies would read this book; I think they should, and I hope they recognize themselves and feel ashamed.

I also learned a lot about cleft palates reading this; I knew what they looked like, but I never realized how many other problems and health issues went along with it.

I won a free copy of this book from Library Thing.

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## Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

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## Wendy says

Karl Schonborn was born with a birth defect that not only left his speech unclear, and his face asymmetrical, but also left him with a heart murmur that in his youth crippled him psychologically because he feared an early death. "Cleft Heart" is not just a story about Karl's struggle for a normal life, but it's about his courage, perseverance and endurance from the risky operations he endures throughout his life, to the bullying and taunting at school, to his restriction from sports a loss that meant loneliness instead of acceptance. With wit, humour, the love of his family, advanced medical technology and the dogged determination of speech

therapists Karl rises above his insecurities, his lack of self-esteem, shyness and social awkwardness to find success in intellectual pursuits and in debating as well as in a quest for an enduring love. When his life seems full to overflowing a tragedy strikes that threatens to tear his newfound happiness apart, but Karl is a survivor and when life seems bleakest he thrives. This is a story that will warm the heart and give hope when life seems dark and depressing.

This coming-of-age narrative is set against the turbulence and growing pains after WW II when America dealt with issues like nuclear weapons, doomsday scenarios, controversial political debates, assassinations, a Cold War, racial integration, and a rising tide of pacifism during and after the Vietnam War. Although I found Karl's journey of self-discovery slowed the momentum of the novel a bit, the men and women in "Cleft Heart" are fascinating in their interactions as well as complex and honest with all their strengths and weaknesses. Laura Schonborn a loving and dedicated mother, a resilient woman who succumbs to loneliness and a lack of self-worth, while her husband Jack a perfectionist, ambitious and selfish, unwittingly neglects the severity of his wife's problems. Sharon Belton, Karl's girlfriend is kind and non-judgemental, her need for total commitment taking her on a journey that brings her maturity and renewed love. And then there are people in Karl's life whose cruelty and violence will make him self-aware and stronger with the experience; like the brutality and heartlessness of school bullies like Danny Gemelli and Ron Allen, and the insensitivity of teachers with their instinctive need to inflict pain without listening to reason.

This is a story with multiple messages about intolerance, discrimination and suicide as well as relationships, unconditional love, friendship and choices. It is powerful in its sincerity and honesty and I highly recommend it.

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