



Too Cool for School: A Memoir

Elizabeth Collins

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TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL is an exciting new memoir by award-winning essayist and teacher Elizabeth Collins.

Elizabeth Collins was considered an excellent, highly qualified high school English teacher, but a sudden partisan attack against her purpose and character left Collins reeling and nearly destroyed her teaching career.

Collins became an unwitting target, “a too-liberal” teacher with an Obama sticker on her car and a Ms. in front of her name who, a couple people feared, might “indoctrinate” conservative, Catholic girls into her own intellectual, independent ways.

What began with a petty complaint spiraled into heinous threats against Collins’ family, relentless legal harassment, heart problems, and an internationally reported fiasco.

Lauded as “a hero and a martyr” for refusing to give in after the threats and for daring to write about her experiences as a teacher, Collins was also considered dangerous because of her open-minded politics and willingness to speak.

TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL explains the kind of teacher Collins was and is, what she wrote about teaching on her widely-read blog, Pretty Freaky, and how she survived the madness of being the center of a story that is still reported—and misreported.

When a good teacher can be targeted for having interesting ideas about teaching, and using social media to share her thoughts, who is safe? Who will want to teach in the current teacher-hating climate where teachers are not allowed to do their jobs?

Collins’ fascinating memoir is at once heartbreaking, deeply funny, uplifting, and terrifying. Filled with invaluable teaching tips and lesson ideas, along with the provocative story of Collins’ educational background and unconventional classroom experiences, TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL is essential reading for all teachers, parents, students, and anyone concerned with the state of American education today.

Too Cool for School: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Too Cool for School: A Memoir for online ebook

Nicole says

I won this book in a first reads giveaway...

Memoirs/Biographies/Autobiographies are not my forte these days, I prefer to spend my free time in fictional places, but this book intrigued me. Partially because it was based in the education world (as I am) and also because it promised an honest look at how society, in this instance, failed to protect one of its own, instead ignoring, attacking, and judging.

I have seen the world Ms. Collins comes from...the good side and the bad. I have been the type to curl up in a ball like an armadillo and take it, so to read how she stood her ground and went public (yikes!) is rather inspiring. Although occasionally the opinions she expressed rubbed me the wrong way, I respect that not everyone thinks as I do. ;)

I did really enjoy the chapter on PTSD for teachers...that resonated with me in a big way. Being locked into the teaching way of life for so long, and then being, well...free of it, is...a dramatic shock to the system, to say the least. Whether one left of their own free will or not, it's quite an adjustment, and it's nice to hear someone else's take on it. I found myself wishing there had been more at the end, about how it felt to come out into a different life. I have many times found myself trying to describe the feeling to those about to leave the teaching field, and it's difficult to describe.

Well written, and an eye-opening example of how today's technologies have brought wonderful tools for learning and communicating, as well as the nastiest side of our societal personality, to the forefront of education.

Kerri says

I was interested to read this book to find out exactly what happened to Collins from her point of view. We have a lot in common. We are close in age. We both had similar educational experiences. We share an intense love of *The Catcher in the Rye*. We were both fortunate to find jobs teaching eleventh grade American Literature in independent, single-sex Catholic schools. However, that's where the similarities end. I find myself in a largely supportive community where I feel my colleagues are on my side. She felt ignored upon arrival.

No one, and I mean no one, deserves to be treated as Collins was treated. Nonetheless, her anger and defensiveness linger throughout *every* chapter of the book, and I found the organization and arc of the narrative a little uneven. Still, this is an important story that I'm glad she decided to share.

For anyone who is interested, this book is available free on Kindle to Amazon Prime members.

Katie says

Very interesting look into educational politics. We often hear of unfair business practices in many industries, but mistreatment of faculty in private education was not something I had before considered. The takeaway message (for me, at least) is simple: parents need to be savvy consumers when deciding where to place their child into school. People boycott Apple for their treatment of workers, why don't educated parents adopt the same attitude and ensure that their children will be learning in a, for lack of a better term, "fair trade" school?

Sara Lim says

As a student, I've always wondered what it's like from the teacher's perspective. I will be receiving a copy of this book through the First Reads program, and I can't wait to find out how one teacher deals with an interesting situation. I will update this review when I finish the book.

Myrna says

Another good find in the Goodread's giveaway section. Never heard of Elizabeth Collins or "the incident" that led to her being driven out of her teaching job. I did not win this book but it sounded interesting and interesting it was. This book has a little bit for everyone. Liked her style of writing too. While reading the book, I felt like she was on my couch sharing her thoughts and ideas. Look forward to reading more from Ms. Collins.

Amanda says

Won as part of the Goodreads first reads program. Can't wait to read it!

Tia says

First and foremost, per GoodReads guidelines, I must declare that I received this book free as part of their First Reads giveaway program.

It's an odd feeling to want to like a book about something tragic, especially something that actually happened to someone. Similarly, it's also a bit challenging to critique writing of something that actually happened because things in life don't always come packaged like a well-polished story.

However, that being said, I did find some aspects of the book that made the experience of reading it a little less enjoyable. First, the whole book is written very much like a personal account rather than a story. While reading, I kept thinking it reads like a blog post, but she included many of her blogs posts (related to the incident and otherwise) at the end and I found them to, generally, be more enjoyable. I think this was largely due to the fact that the blog posts genuinely seemed to want to explore a topic whereas the book seemed to

want to justify why she did what she did and said what she said. Along with that is my wish that things were presented chronologically. She will discuss writing a post that gets quoted, but we either read it out of context or have to flip back and forth between sections of the book. Third, while I'm not sure she would have been able to do this, it would have also been nice to have included, like her blog posts, things that were written about her rather than just hearing of them. Finally, I wasn't prepared, based on the marketing, for the book to include so much that isn't about the "incident." In fact, the "incident" is only about a 100 pages of the whole book.

Despite these things, I also think that certain aspects of the book stand out. She shares, despite her lack of state certifications, many great education ideals (I was actually surprised to read of her lack of certification because of the way she talked about her teaching). If I wasn't so tired of reading and writing about those same ideals in order to get my state certification, I am sure that that part of the book would have been more moving. However, I can see that that is, at the moment, the fault of the reader and circumstance. More importantly, I think, though was my first reaction to her mentioning writing the blog post that incites everything that ensues, which was, "uh oh, you don't ever mention your students in a public forum, even anonymously" because, as a soon-to-be-teacher that has been drilled into me from co-workers, professors, and the media (sorry, Elizabeth). Later in the book, she attacks that belief and how, really, that's the core of this problem. It isn't that she was mistreated, that she was fired for something innocuous, but that, as teachers, we are held to this impossible android-like standard, inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, as she continues to point out, we, the teachers, are just as much to blame for this as we willingly let it happen by taking these jobs that demand our obedience, even in our personal lives, and don't do anything to change the situation. She challenges us, like a great leader, to demand our freedom (and, ultimately, that of our students). In fact, she does so at great detriment to herself as I'm sure she gets more flack for actually publishing her story and writing about it directly rather than vaguely in her blog. I can only hope that if I find myself in a situation where I have to defend myself or my "liberal" teaching, that I will be able to do so as she did.

So, while I may not have loved it as a piece of writing, I think its content is powerful. It reminds us of what's wrong with education as well as a society as a whole and she does all that by simply telling us a little something about her experiences.

Jenny Everett says

I personally liked this book, and I had heard some stories about this, but I didn't understand what had happened. I personally am Liberal, and some of my teachers are, so I was confused on how that would destroy a career, and this book was eye opening.

Avi says

This is a powerful book with many layers and many issues to discuss. I see that new teachers approach it from a different perspective than I'd expect experienced teachers to. Is the issue that we as teachers should not blog? I don't think so, and that's not what Elizabeth Collins is saying. This memoir shouts back at those who criticize teachers for being human. It offers fabulous lesson ideas, and the traditional memoir bits are inspiring.

The "incident" as everyone is putting it, is horrifying. Collins does an excellent job with this. It brought shudders to my spine. I think I cried. Actually, it was pretty painful to read because it was so real, and yet we can see how the author carefully constructed this part so as not to incite more attacks. That's an artist at work.

As for organization of the complicated story, I found it as a whole artful and thoughtful. This book could not be written in chronological fashion. We need the prequel details, the crisis, the denouement, and indeed, we need the blog postings. We get all of that and much more.

If you are expecting pure crisis, this memoir does not give you that. It gives you a life story, a complete picture of how a young woman grows up to be a writer and a teacher, even though she did not plan on the teaching. It is a book about how she uses her writing to help her students learn, and how she used her writing to help herself. It's a beautiful work.
