


Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived: The Surprising Story of Apples in the South

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what if I *couldn't* make it better?" Shields thinks to herself (p. 37).

Making it better—or attempting to—is an ongoing theme in the book and is what Shields tries to do for many years of her children's lives. When Shields learns that Jessica, one of her twins, is seemingly experiencing cognitive developmental delays, she attempts to reverse those issues. First, though, she must push past her child's doctor's reassurances that there is nothing wrong with Jessica in the first place, despite the fact that Catherine suspects there is a problem as early as at six months. The doctor says, "Remember, I've said twins develop at different rates? It's too early to determine if there's a problem...I'm the one who's a pediatrician, so who do you want to believe?" (p. 47).

Learning early on that Jessica endured a brain injury shortly after birth that caused some of her delays, Shields unknowingly searches for a happy medium, at one point trying to "fix Jessica." Yet at other times, Shields, in the pursuit of getting remedial help for Jessica, is told by one of Jessica's preschool teachers that Jessica was just taking her time finding her own "sea legs."

Part of what makes *The Shape of Normal* such a compelling read is Shields' brutal self-examination as a parent with the reader. One gets the sense that she never censors herself while writing her memoir. "I hate having a handicapped child, and I hate myself for hating it," she utters while talking to her blind therapist (p. 101).

The Shape of Normal is worth reading because Shields' honesty about her insecurities around parenting a child with a disability is so compelling. "It dawned on me that I had spent years trying to fix Jessica," Shields admits. "But I realized she was never the broken one" (p. 177).

At times, Shields finds examples of other parents finding strength in the face of adversity regarding the lives of their children, but that doesn't give her comfort. Shields asks herself and the reader, "What was wrong with me? Did I judge her for how she made her life look so ordinary? She had a child facing a terminal diagnosis and yet privately, I believed I was the one who should be pitied...I buried myself beneath layers of shame" (pp. 125–126). Of a neighborhood friend who has a four-year-old son who isn't expected to live past six years old due to his Emery-Dreifuss muscular dystrophy, Shields writes, "I resented

the ease with which she accepted her situation" (p. 125).

Yet Shields continues to look for comforting thoughts about her less-than-perfect situation with daughter Jessica's disability. She doesn't ever seem to find the happy medium to comfort her—but she does come close. "Normal is an illusion," she writes, quoting cartoonist Charles Addams. "What is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly" (p. 218).

The Shape of Normal, a 2023 category winner of the American Writing Awards, is noteworthy for both the author's painstaking honesty and the documentation of a mother's very genuine angst when she learns her child is a "different kind of perfect" from the rest of the children. *The Shape of Normal* is highly recommended for both academic and public libraries.

Peter R. Dean, Delta State University

Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived: The Surprising Story of Apples in the South

Diane Flynt
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Carolina Press, 2023
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Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived: The Surprising Story of Apples in the South is part botany, part biography, part horticultural history, and part human history. Flynt brings these aspects together elegantly and powerfully, weaving all of the elements to tell the surprising and dramatic story of apples. In the same vein as the classic *Plants, Man, and Life* by Edgar Anderson, she explores what makes apples unique botanically and ties the science of apples to human culture. This book is even more compelling because Flynt tells the story of apples in the South in concert with her personal narrative, evolving from a jet-setting business professional to an agricultural entrepreneur starting a hard cider orchard and press.

This is a multilayered and complicated story, and Flynt guides the reader with a structured map from the very beginning. *Wild, Tamed, Lost and Revived* anchors the reader as they move through apple history and author history. Each

section focuses on a key aspect of apples in the South. “Wild” focuses on the botany of apples and the characteristics that make this species useful to humans. “Tamed” describes the ways by which humans leverage these characteristics to develop apple varieties that serve many purposes. “Lost” delves into the history of apples in the South, including economic changes due to agricultural priorities, the displacement of Indigenous peoples who created many apple varieties, the unacknowledged contributions of enslaved Africans, and the destruction of family farms in the designation of public lands. “Revived” discusses the hopeful revitalization of our rich apple history, as modern-day farmers and horticulturalists work to restore the diverse apple resources of the past.

Flynt writes about these topics while telling a parallel story of recapturing the values that are important to her family: love of land, resourcefulness, independence, and an existence in balance with the natural world. Flynt describes her growing disconnection with an urban-based daily lifestyle. She acknowledges her success and then brings us into her struggles as she makes major changes. Her personal narrative moves around in time, with memories of growing up closer to the land, an appreciation for landscape, and family as farmers and gardeners.

Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived is well researched and documented. Flynt consulted historical nursery catalogs, newspapers, articles, and correspondence to demonstrate the diversity and the popularity of apple varieties over time. She combines archival records with in-person interviews, giving voices to the apple varieties via nostalgic recollections. The photos and illustrations enhance this written and oral history. Mosier’s color photographs document the state of apple growing today, with close-ups of apple blossoms, orchard landscapes, and apple products. One of the very special aspects of this book is that Flynt included illustrations from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Pomological Watercolor Collection. Each watercolor is a unique portrait of a specific apple variety, detailing the apple exterior and a cross section of the interior.

The story of apples in the South is surprising, dramatic, and continuing. In “Forfeited,” Flynt writes about the loss of apple cider varieties, “I believe this loss diminishes our world. Eating only fresh apples, consuming the same varieties all

year – this, I believe, narrows our experience. We are not just eating from a shallow bowl; we are missing the opportunity to connect with our past through this fruit” (p. 133).

Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived is an important contribution to the body of work supporting the farm to table ethos and a testament to the value of biodiversity. The book is relevant to studies in ecological anthropology and agricultural, economic, and political history, especially in the southern United States. At the same time, Flynt’s writing style and the beautiful photographs make this a very readable book for any gardener or backyard farmer. Her personal story, linked to the natural landscape, is of interest to readers who appreciate authors Annie Dillard, Barbara Kingsolver, Janisse Ray, and Terry Tempest Williams. In a world that is increasingly digital, remote, and not place-based, Flynt eloquently reminds us to consider our important connections to nature, one apple at a time.

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