

[Free pdf] Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage

Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage

Dennis Covington, Vicki Covington
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Dennis Covington, Vicki Covington : Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. BookBy BeartrapGood Reading that is not too Heavy,12 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Honesty in writing vs. Honesty in relationshipBy A CustomerSince "Salvation on Sand Mountain," "Bird of Paradise," and "The Last Hotel for Women," are among my favorite recent books, I was surprised by how much I disliked "Cleaving." Another Covington fan warned me against reading the book, but I was curious, in the same way one cannot help but pick up those grocery store tabloids when one is waiting in a long line.While the Covingtons repeatedly evidence dishonesty in their relationship, they insist that they must be

honest in writing about their relationship. Why is honesty in writing valued so highly by the Covingtons when it was so easily dismissed in their relationship? And there is something self-congratulatory in their tone that made their revelations more characteristic of exaggerated fish stories than of honest personal reflection. I can understand, perhaps, the value to the Covingtons of writing these experiences together and reviewing them together; I cannot see the value of publishing them. If you must read this book, for goodness sakes, check it out from the library. (Sorry, .com.) This book isn't worth the money or aggravation. 5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. An honest, beautifully written portrait of a marriage
By Carroll Dale Short (Dshort5005@aol.com) Few readers are likely to come away from *CLEAVING* unmoved--some to anger (as initial public reaction in the authors' hometown of Birmingham, Ala., demonstrates), others to hope, sadness, spiritual reflection, an abiding sense of shared experience with two erstwhile strangers...or, all of the above. Dennis and Vicki Covington, both successful writers/teachers with 7 previous volumes between them--one a finalist for the National Book Award--were originally commissioned by a publisher to jointly write an inspirational book about the ups and downs of marriage and the importance of the spiritual dimension in that struggle. Its title was to be *LIVING WATER*, a metaphor based on their church mission work in South America, helping to drill wells for underprivileged communities. With the book deadline looming nearer and nearer, there was only one problem: their outwardly "model" suburban marriage was in serious disarray, and they found that they couldn't, in good conscience, create a work of spiritual platitudes with themselves as examples. Instead, they did what many people would have found unthinkable: they told the truth. The result is a powerfully honest, blunt, and yet graceful memoir...writing that is disturbing, fascinating, incandescent in its unadorned style, and ultimately redemptive. For decades, gifted authors such as John Cheever, John Updike, and Richard Yates have written unforgettable fiction about American marriages. *CLEAVING* is a worthy addition to that list. It's also true, in every sense of the word.

"Marriage is like a rain forest," Vicki Covington writes in *Cleaving*. "The story of a marriage contains all that grows in the canopy, all that is visible from an aerial, or public, view. The understory of a marriage is the place where . . . we struggle, fight, and conceive. It's the place where compost is made, where anything can grow, including forgiveness." Told in the authors' alternating voices, *Cleaving* is both the story and the understory of a marriage. Childhood acquaintances, Vicki and Dennis meet again in their twenties and wed. They "promise each other nothing" and get more than they'd bargained for: alcoholism, infidelity, infertility, uncertainty. Tumult gives way to sobriety, parenthood, and meaningful work, but a yearning remains. In a quest to root themselves in the larger world, they embark on a mission to dig water wells in Central America, assuaging a spiritual thirst by addressing a practical need. Yet even this is part of the story--the visible, overarching canopy--of the marriage. The understory--and the triumph of this haunting book, which is neither sentimental nor cynical--is its portrayal of the eddying of passion through the institution that enshrines but cannot contain it. A soulful and unsparing portrait of the forces that threaten--and sustain--a relationship over time.

.com One doesn't know whether to admire Vicki and Dennis Covington for writing *Cleaving* or to shudder and hide one's head in the sand. Written in alternating voices, this tag-team memoir draws a thorough portrait of one marriage, complete with decades' worth of adultery, drugs, alcoholism, abortion, and sin. In the Covingtons' case, these bohemian carryings-on come mixed with a goodly portion of old-time religion. After going sober, the couple settled down to raising daughters, attending church, doing good works, and writing books (they claim 7 between them, including Dennis's thoughtful *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, a finalist for the National Book Award). They even spearheaded a church mission to drill wells in Central America, a project which here yields not only life-giving water but also a rich flood of marital metaphor. Yet their problems didn't go away. Charged with writing an inspirational book about marriage, the Covingtons found their own union once again in serious disarray. Rather than making themselves look good, they chose to tell the absolute truth about what had passed between them, and in the process they created this unusual memoir, an unflinching look at the forces that bind a couple together as well as those that rend them apart. After all, as Vicki points out, the word *cleave*--taken from the Biblical injunction for a man to leave his mother and father--can mean either to cling to or to divide, "as by a cutting blow." In their case, it meant both: "Love plays us like an accordion. Together, apart, together, apart..." People talk about honesty as if that were a literary virtue in itself. It's not, of course, but this excruciatingly honest memoir has many virtues of its own, including some lovely, unfussy writing and a steadfast refusal to look away when that would be the easiest thing to do. Whether all this spiritual soul-baring makes you feel compassionate or just queasy is, however, a matter of taste. --Mary Park
From Publishers Weekly
Collaborating for the first time, journalist Dennis Covington (*Salvation on Sand Mountain*) and his novelist wife, Vicki Covington (*The Last Hotel for Women*), attempt to address the dangers and joys of matrimonial life. In a "he said, she said" format, they write of having been childhood acquaintances before marrying in their rocky, alcoholic 20s; of trying to shield their children from their marital indiscretions; and of becoming spiritually impassioned volunteer diggers of wells in Central America. Both spouses write with simple grace, providing evocative details that sum up their experiences. But while some passages are remarkably insightful about the institution of

marriage, much of the book is dedicated to their individual hand-wringing over the consequences of their affairs in what they had agreed would be an open relationship. In a particularly forced analogy, Vicki writes that "marriage is like a rain forest. It is in the understory that we struggle, fight and conceive." In the Covington marriage, it seems, it's always monsoon season. The couple triumphs over alcoholism and infertility, but the writing of each projects an edge of narcissism and selfishness, with blame easily assigned and credit only grudgingly granted. Later, when the Covingtons yearn for spiritual enlightenment, they take up well digging, finding water on their own property and in poverty-stricken El Salvador. Both of them imbue the simple action of boring into the earth with enormous significance as they try to find not just God, but also justification for hurting their other lovers. Although the book draws some power from its confessional style, it founders as a source of wisdom about marriage. Agent, Amanda Urban. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal. Adultery. Abortion. Alcoholism. Reading the Covingtons' painfully honest narrative of their tumultuous 20-year marriage is a bit like slowing down to look at a car wreck--gruesomely compelling. Yet this is not your typical dysfunctional family memoir; it is also a moving quest for spiritual redemption. (LJ 5/1/99) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.