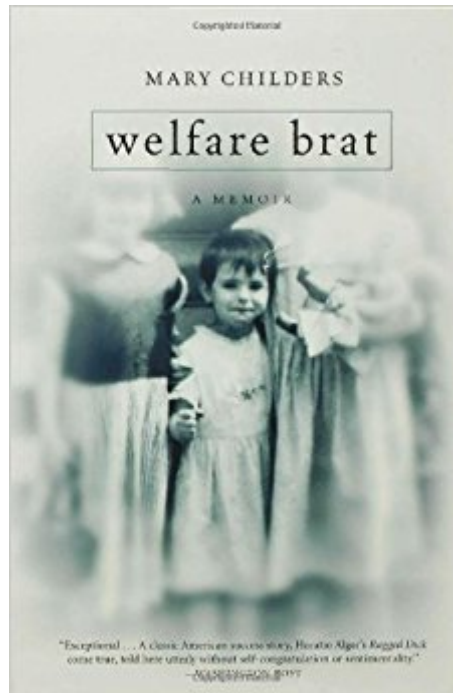




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# Welfare Brat



## Synopsis

Mary Childers's intimate and frank memoir tells the story of growing up in a family in which five out of seven children dropped out of high school and four different fathers dropped out of sight. With this lyrical and often humorous examination of how she became the first person in her family to attend college, Childers illuminates the causes of welfare dependence, generational poverty, and submission to a popular culture that values sexuality more than self-esteem and self-sufficiency. "An eloquent reminder of the human possibility that public assistance can protect and preserve...[Mary] grasps the contradictions of her life and lives it, triumphantly and emphatically, like a chameleon. Ultimately, she ascends out of urban poverty via scholarship, hard work, imagination, and a strong sense of self."-Elle "Childers' tale of growing up white, Irish-Catholic and on welfare in the Bronx rises above cliché and melodrama with humor and uncommon grace."-Atlanta Journal-Constitution "Whatever preconceptions we may have about 'welfare moms' and their families, some will be challenged and some confirmed by this feisty autobiography."-Boston Globe Mary Childers is a consultant who mediates conflict and provides discrimination prevention training for higher education and corporations. She has a Ph.D. in English literature and lives in Hanover, New Hampshire. Click [HERE](#) to download the Welfare Brat Teacher's Guide.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Growing up a poor white girl in the Bronx in the 1960s, Childers endured a childhood marred by violence, poverty, neglect and shame. In this poignant memoir, she recounts it all with astonishing

honesty and grace. Focusing on her life between the ages of 10 and 16, Childers draws a vivid portrait of a family fighting for survival, triumphing over unwanted pregnancies and cruel boyfriends, and held together by an alcoholic but occasionally heroic single mother. The strength of this heartrending tale lies in its contradictions: Childers loves her family but also bitterly resents them, longing for the day that she can escape only to find that she misses them when she is gone. The depth and complexity of the individuals, particularly Childers's alternately selfish and sympathetic mother, is a testament to her compassion as a writer and her ability to empathize with and forgive people's flaws. Childers neither romanticizes nor bemoans her family's struggle, but tells her story candidly in prose that sparkles with energy and wit, speaking wisely on everything from race relations to the Church's stance on birth control. Although the ending feels somewhat rushed, the book is an insightful and powerful tale that emphasizes "what a heroine you have to be to drag yourself out of bed day after day into minimum-wage jobs, aware that you'll never get ahead and fearful that everything will collapse." Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Childers describes her journey from a childhood growing up on welfare in the Bronx, one of seven children with four different fathers, to her life as a consultant with a Ph.D. in English literature. Her family had no phone and occasionally no electricity, and little food; and their mother often disappeared, leaving Mary in charge of her younger siblings. Something in Mary and her sister, Joan, makes them realize that they must break the cycle of poverty, and that the key is education. Mary is placed in accelerated programs, completing junior high in one year, and entering high school in 1966 in the tenth grade. Along the way she babysits to earn her own money, joins a gang until she perceives their hatred of minorities, experiences racial hatred herself after Martin Luther King's assassination, and eventually gets a full scholarship to a small college in western New York. Remarkably free of bitterness as she matures, Childers begins to focus on how hard her mother tried, instead of how often she failed. Deborah Donovan Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This story is a memoir with lots of holes in the story. We had to read it for a class and it was pretty dry reading. It skips around a bit and you're left feeling bothered by the lack of substance.

One of the best memoirs I've read in a long time. I had the pleasure of recently seeing Mary Childers speak and she is as straight-forward and entertaining as her book. She simply tells it like it

is--no sensationalism, no sappiness, no "poor me," no "look how wonderful I am!" She just tells a very moving story in a compelling and engaging way. Afterwards, you can't help thinking, "Wow--what a long road she traveled!" and admire her intelligence, tenacity, success, and her unselfish life in helping others. Bravo, Mary Childers!

This book will tug at your heart strings and make you laugh at the same time. It was a good read. It definitely made me think twice about some of the things I complain about. But since I have read this book I have a better outlook on my life. I am now truly thankful for everything I have.

Even if Mary Childers' childhood was only half as horrific as the one she describes in her memoir, she deserves the Medal of Honor for having the mental and physical courage to transcend her beginnings. The book is a riveting description of the worst that life on welfare has to offer, but Childers doesn't explain what factors helped her break out of the cycle of poverty. Was it the moral tenants she was exposed to in her Catholic background? A few good teachers? Caring and involved school counselors? Her exposure to "normal" life via The Fresh Air Fund? Or was she just born with "the right stuff"? Her writing displays a chilling lack of introspection and gratitude for those who may have helped her. But maybe that is all part of being a "welfare brat." Nonetheless, I think this book should be required reading in the schools. Certainly it is a strong argument for federally funded childcare facilities that might help give children of even the most dysfunctional families a glimpse of the possibilities for a better life.

great read

Ordered as a textbook. Great story, very well-written. I couldn't put it down!

Mary tells a heart-wreching story of her early life. It is brutally honest and full of the love and self respect that she embodies as a grown woman now. She is an inspiration and an amazing person! Read it and make up your own mind :)

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in a child's journey through poverty and welfare and the challenges she overcomes to make something of herself despite her family members discouraging her.

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