

**Book Title: The Privilege of Youth: A Teenager's Story of Longing for Acceptance and Friendship**

**Author: Dave Pelzer**

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**Book Review by Patricia Kuefler-Ross**

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Dave Pelzer writes his inspiring story in an attempt to encourage others and offer hope for individuals with an abusive past. The author credited those who helped him through his adolescent years by stating, "If it wasn't for the invaluable assistance of others, I was destined to be doomed." This book illustrates how a supportive group of friends and a good neighborhood can make the difference in an at-risk teen's life.

Pelzer describes how he always felt that he did not fit in, and that he tried to follow cues from his peers on how to act so that he could "belong." Pelzer describes how bullies targeted him and reinforced his feelings as an outcast. Numerous foster placements also contributed to his feelings of oddity. It wasn't until he found a supportive father figure, a neighborhood, and some boys who became his lifelong friends that his needs to belong were satisfied. Through it all, Dave Pelzer became a survivor who came to understand that if he could survive his unique past that set him apart, he was capable of handling anything.

I feel that this story has major implications for educators and others interested in working with children. The author helps us to remember that some children may find it difficult to understand love and the sense of community. Pelzer's description of wanting to belong and feel validated is such a basic human need that is so often taken for granted. It is difficult to imagine that some children feel they are not worthy of respect and dignity as a human being. Teachers need to keep in mind that some students' lives are disrupted by a number of home and community factors and that they may not have anyone who can help them be successful. The author's story makes me think about students who move frequently during the school year and how disruptive this is for a child's basic need to belong in a community.

Dave Pelzer tells how his need to belong was satisfied by working endless hours and sacrificing many of the more enjoyable activities enjoyed by his peers. It appeared that his early entry into the work world forced him to grow up faster than others his age. In the concluding chapter, the author confides that his accomplishments eventually helped him gain the acceptance and a sense of belonging that he yearned for in his younger days.

Hopefully, in reading this story, educators can learn to identify children who have difficulty socializing with their peers and who tend to self-isolate and escape through work.

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A Review of  
The Privilege of Youth; A Teenager's Story of Longing for Acceptance and Friendship  
by Dave Pelzer

'Wow, this is it! The moment I have been searching for. No more endless nights of staring at the ceiling, wondering if life could become any worse! My life has finally turned around. True friendships, a sense of belonging, a family I have yearned for.....support to overcome the hell of my past...it is all uphill from here! Yep, this is what it is like to be normal. This is the way life is supposed to be.

But wait, is happiness supposed to carry a price? In and out of foster homes, physical violence at school, feelings of reckless abandonment, this isn't what I have dreamed about. I again retreat inside my own shell so others may not hurt me. I begin working full time hours and drop out of school because at 18 I will be left to survive on my own..... life won't find me in the place I left.....without a future. No, happiness has not found me. My mind is full of self-pity, anxiety, and fear. Fear of the unknown, of being a social misfit, of failing.....' This is the true story of Dave Pelzer and his emotional rollercoaster called life.

This novel was written about the author's teenage years as he searches for his lost childhood, a sense of belonging, and happiness. At age 12, he was removed from an abusive home where his mom, in her drunken state, had deemed him the cause of the family's misfortunes. He had learned to loathe himself. As he moved from foster home to foster home, he dared to dream that life may turn around. Yet, an occurrence would always seem to bring him back to his own realization that a normal life for him was not meant to be and he would retreat back into depression and self-pity.

One summer he moved to a place deemed heaven on earth, the magical place of Duinsmoore Way. Although Dave only lived here for four months, this became a turning point in his life, and he would later return many times. It's here that he made friends and built life-long relationships with families. It is with their support and guidance that he relives the childhood he never had, finds love and acceptance, and dreams for his future.

After joining the military, Dave later marries and has a son of his own. He writes many books and speaks of his misfortunes and the search for inner peace so others may learn from his trials. His past provides an avenue of promise for many without hope. The well written novel provides understanding and tolerance of others less fortunate. His life is now filled with happiness and love but his past continues, and always will, haunt him and control his daily actions and reactions to what he is met with in the road of life. As he continues to search for the magic of Duinsmoore Way, he begins a new mission to provide a life of hope, love, and security for his son.