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Dover woman's memoir gives big boost to a diminutive woman

By Dan Goldberg/For The Star-Ledger
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DOVER -- Julie Genovese stared into the mirror, looking over her body. It was a self-esteem exercise.

Born with Spondyloepiphyseal Dysplasia, or dwarfism, she stood 4-feet, 3-inches tall.

She was an adult but had never overcome her childhood fears that her dwarfism made her less of a person than everyone else.

The exercise should have been simple. Look into the mirror and say 'I love you, Julie.'

She couldn't do it. She just didn't believe, so she started small.

"I love my wrists," she would say. Days passed.

"My ears aren't so bad," she added.

Those tiny cracks in the shell helped hatch "Nothing Short of Joy," a memoir scheduled to be released Monday.

The book details Genovese's childhood, growing up the youngest of six children - the last two were born with the same genetic condition.

It delves into her worries about finding a husband, her insecurities about her height and finally the realization that her emotional wounds were self-inflicted.

Genovese, 46, lives in Dover with her husband Bill and two sons, Spencer, 9, and Kyler, 5. Her husband and children are average height.

Genovese's condition occurs in about 1 in every 100,000 births.

Typically, a person with her genetic condition has a shortened torso with average-sized hands and feet.

Genovese, whose feet are proportional to her body but has relatively large hands, had both knees and hips replaced to alleviate the pain and stiffness in her joints.

"All her life she's been told what she couldn't do," Bill said. "In my opinion, she was really good at whatever she tried to do. She had a good attitude about life except when she would withdraw into the darkness."



Those episodes could be triggered, Bill said, by an insensitive comment from a passing stranger or an awkward glance from a child.

It was her writing, Genovese said, that finally rid her of her fears.

"It was just so cathartic," she said. "I realized that all this shame I had built up was hurting. The book gave meaning to my struggle."

The book - while still in its early stages - morphed from a therapeutic exercise into an inspirational tool for others.

"I thought if this could help me it is possible that reading it could help others," Genovese said.

It was easy, she said, to choose the stories for the book. They are the ones that replayed themselves in her head when she was frustrated.

Being teased and taunted by kids or poked and prodded by doctors left her certain she was defective. Even when the teasing stopped, the insecurities held.

"I don't understand why I couldn't let it go," Genovese said, "or why writing it was the final piece."

Her book, published by Behler Publications, has already garnered much praise and attention.

"What I see is how you turn disabilities into abilities," said Bernie Seigel, a surgeon and author, whose praise appears on the back of the book. "That's the message she can give. You don't need to walk around being bitter, resentful, complaining because we all have wounds, and I think she sets an example."