



## ‘Beautiful Scars’ Captures Essence of Shriners’ Mission Since 1922

### A Review



*Beautiful Scars*. Kilee Brookbank and Lori Highlander, with Jessica Noll. 295 pages. Georgetown, OH: KiCam Projects, 2016.

On November 10, 2014, 16-year-old Kilee Brookbank came home from school and detected an unusual--a “terrible--really terrible”--odor in their rural Georgetown, OH, home. She took a lighter from a kitchen drawer and went to the bathroom to light the cinnamon mocha-scented candle. She “rolled down the silver spark wheel and pushed down the red button on the lighter, igniting a small flame in the candlewick. Click.”

“Boom!” The entire, gas-filled house exploded around her--she “was enveloped in raging flames,” blown to the bathroom floor, unconscious. The sound of her small dog Digger barking in her ear awakened her, and she staggered outside, disoriented, with Digger still barking at her side. Her head was throbbing, and she was hot--“Super hot.” She was on fire!

“My life changed on November 10, 2014.” She writes in *Beautiful Scars*, a book she and her mother, Lori Highlander, wrote to share what it means to be a “survivor” of one of the most catastrophic experiences a person, young or old, can endure--to be severely burned over 45 percent of one’s body.

The book is a personal testimony, in minute detail, of *surviving*. It is a commentary on the complex social history of our time. It is vital accounting of the great success of SHC - Cincinnati in helping Kilee become whole again after so much had been taken.

Told in a remarkably creative style, the story is presented in antiphony of alternating units between Kilee and Lori her mother. This delightful antiphonal mode creates echoes of incidents and experiences from the unique vantage points of daughter and mother. Readers are informed with a depth not otherwise possible. *Beautiful Scars* is a memoir of a severely injured girl metamorphosing into a beautiful, mature, strong, and loving woman, facing the world tougher than the tragedy she endured. She learns this: “I am not defined by what happened; I’m defined by what I make of my situation.”



Kilee’s mother and father no long live together, and her mom has a new husband. But the dreadful experience of the home explosion and Kilee’s injury made of the individuals a new social entity, wholly concerned about and committed to Kilee’s healing. Love was discovered as a force different from anything each had known, and it united them in a new way. Her brother, boyfriend, and high school classmates learned new transactional expressions of understanding and interacting with Kilee, who had undergone life-changing circumstances. Even celebrity Justin Bieber, who hosted Kilee in his California studio, became a factor in her renewal and happiness. Lori says it so well: “With support of good family and friends, you can get through anything.”

For 38 days, Kilee was a part of the SHC - Cincinnati family. Lori was surprised that “Kilee didn’t have one special person. She had twenty-five special people at Shriners throughout the process. They are there to help, and they know what do to do.” Beyond the painful screaming accompanying treatments, beyond the skin grafts, and intense agony associated with stretching her injured skin at Shriners, Kilee learned during her stay there that in giving we find wholeness--the essence of Shriners’ mission since 1922. Her “Kilee Gives Back” Foundation is committed to raising money for SHC - Cincinnati, and all proceeds of *Beautiful Scars* are being given to the foundation. This book is a must-read for every person in Shrinedom! - Robert Cotner

