

Know my name: a memoir

By Chanel Miller

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Genre and Subject

Rape victims
College students
Autobiographies

Synopsis

The riveting, powerful memoir of the woman whose statement to Brock Turner gave voice to millions of survivors. She was known to the world as Emily Doe when she stunned millions with a letter. Brock Turner had been sentenced to just six months in county jail after he was found sexually assaulting her on Stanford's campus. Her victim impact statement was posted on BuzzFeed, where it instantly went viral--viewed by eleven million people within four days, it was translated globally and read on the floor of Congress; it inspired changes in California law and the recall of the judge in the case. Thousands wrote to say that she had given them the courage to share their own experiences of assault for the first time. Now she reclaims her identity to tell her story of trauma, transcendence, and the power of words. It was the perfect case, in many ways--there were eyewitnesses, Turner ran away, physical evidence was immediately secured. But her struggles with isolation and shame during the aftermath and the trial reveal the oppression victims face in even the best-case scenarios. Her story illuminates a culture biased to protect perpetrators, reveals a criminal justice system designed to fail the most vulnerable, and, ultimately, shines with the courage required to move through suffering and live a full and beautiful life. Know My Name will forever transform the way we think about sexual assault, challenging our beliefs about what is acceptable and speaking truth to the tumultuous reality of healing. It also introduces readers to an extraordinary writer, one whose words have already changed our world. Entwining pain, resilience, and humour, this memoir will stand as a modern classic.

Author Biography

Chanel Miller is a writer and artist. She was known anonymously after she was sexually assaulted on the campus of Stanford University in 2015 by Brock Allen Turner. The following year, her victim impact statement at his sentencing hearing went viral after it was published online by BuzzFeed, being read 11 million times within four days.[3] Miller was referred to as "Emily Doe" in court documents and media reports until September 2019, when she relinquished her anonymity and released her memoir Know My Name.

Her memoir, Know My Name, was a New York Times bestseller, a New York Times Book Review Notable Book, and a winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the Ridenhour Book Prize, and the California Book Award. It was also a best book of the year in Time, The Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, NPR, and People, among others. She was named one of the Forbes 30 Under 30 and a Time Next 100 honoree, and was a Glamour Woman of the Year honoree under her pseudonym Emily Doe.

Discussion Starters

1. Did you have any preconceptions about sexual assault prior to reading *Know My Name*? How has your understanding—of victims, perpetrators, or sexual assault itself—changed, if at all? Is Ellen’s hatred clouding her judgement and blinding her to the flaws in her own family?
2. How did the memoir demonstrate the way media and legal systems frame perpetrators versus victims? Who has the power to tell their story? Who is offered sympathy and humanity and who is not? How does that affect people?
3. Chanel weaves together several elements throughout her memoir, such as the Isla Vista massacre, the testimony of Christine Blasey Ford, street harassment, and more. Why does she do this? What does it say about misogyny and the value of women’s safety? Of women’s bodies? Of women?
4. The case lasted for years, involving several people, especially Chanel’s family and loved ones. How did the case impact Chanel as the victim, including the people she cares about?
5. Throughout the book, there are many heroes, from Chanel’s loved ones to the Swedes to the nurses and officers who cared for her to the district attorney and more. Why is this important? What is the significance of having heroes in stories about injustice?
6. Chanel is a Chinese American woman, who emphasizes this heritage throughout her memoir. Recently, she has been using her voice to advocate against the rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans. Why is being Chinese American important to her and her story? What does it say about privilege and power when it comes to legal systems? Institutions and culture? What is the importance of intersectionality?
7. During her trial, Chanel was persistently asked targeted questions (about her clothing, her previous relationship with alcohol, her previous dating experience). Did her experience with sexism feel familiar to you? How so?
8. In different ways, Chanel shows the pain and isolation of sexual assault. How did systems and/or culture exacerbate that pain or ignore it? What do victims need in terms of support? How can extend empathy and solidarity to victims?
9. Many people think rapists are strangers who jump out of bushes and attack in alleyways, when the reality is that the majority of cases involve a perpetrator the victim already knows. As Chanel says, “The friendly guy who helps you move and assists senior citizens in the pool is the same guy who assaulted me. One person can be capable of both. Society often fails to wrap its head around the fact that these truths often coexist, they are not mutually exclusive. Bad qualities can hide inside a good person. That’s the terrifying part.” Discuss why it’s difficult for people to hold these two truths.
10. What was the effect of the viral victim impact statement’s author being “Emily Doe” when it was first released? How did people respond to the letter and what effect did that response have on Chanel? On other victims?
11. This memoir and its title refer to Chanel releasing her name. What was behind her decision to do so? Why was that important to her? Why might someone choose to come forward with their name and what happened to them and—after having read this book—why not?

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