

She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall Study Guide

She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall by Misty Bernall

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Contents

She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernal Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	4
3-4.....	7
Chapters 5-6.....	9
Chapters 7 - 8.....	11
Characters.....	13
Objects/Places.....	16
Themes.....	18
Style.....	20
Quotes.....	21
Topics for Discussion.....	23



Plot Summary

In *She Said Yes* by Misty Bernal, a mother writes about her daughter who was killed in the Columbine High School massacre. She reflects on the life of her daughter and remembers how Cassie broke the bonds of Satan worship. In the end, she was killed after professing her allegiance to God.

The morning of April 20, 1999, seemed like every other school morning. Misty got her kids up then went to work. At lunchtime she heard that there was trouble at the school. Two gunmen had gone on a rampage, setting off bombs and shooting students in the school.

The parents were sent to two different locations as they waited to hear news regarding their children's safety. Many were sent to Leewood Elementary School, and when that was too crowded, the rest were sent to the public library. Chris, Misty and Brad's son, showed up in the early afternoon, but they had no news of their daughter Cassie. Misty refused to believe that her daughter was dead until the coroner's office called them the next evening.

Misty reflected on their daughter's life. Brad hadn't been ready for children when Misty became pregnant. The moment his daughter was born, his heart changed. He loved her incredibly, and as Cassie grew, she followed him everywhere. Around fifth grade, she started to change from the happy child they knew. She let go of her old friends and remained close to a girl named Mona.

In 1996, Misty found letters Mona and Cassie had written. They were filled with hate talk, satanic symbolism and suggestions of murder. Fearful, she and Brad turned to professionals for help. They enrolled Cassie into a new school and got a restraining order against Mona. Cassie was under strict surveillance, and the only activity in which she could participate in was youth group. This made her very angry, and she threatened to run away or commit suicide. Mona and another friend kept trying to contact her so the family moved.

In 1997, a girl named Jamie who had befriended Cassie invited her to go on a trip with the youth group to Estes Park. In spite of her parent's reservations, Cassie went on the trip. While she was there, something reached through to her, and she decided to give her life to God. When she got home she told her parents that she changed. At first, her mother didn't believe her, but over time she realized something really had changed in her daughter.

Cassie seemed less worried and more peaceful. She didn't run around preaching to everyone, but she made changes in her own life. After a while, she asked her parents to transfer her to Columbine. A friend of hers attended there. They let her go there as long as she didn't hang out with a bad crowd and as long as she kept her grades up. It was at this school that she was asked whether she believed in God. She was shot at close range after answering "yes."



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1 - tuesday

The morning of April 20, 1999, started out similar to every other school day in the household. Brad, the author's husband, left for work at 5:45 AM, and a bit later Misty, the author, woke up the children. Cassie didn't want to get up because she had gone to bed late the night before as she caught up with her homework. They were behind schedule, but at 7:20 AM, Chris headed out the door with his sister Cassie close behind. Her mother noted that the girl wore her favorite Doc Martens shoes. Her mom told her that she loved her, and Cassie responded that she loved her, too. The girl continued to walk to school, which was only a hundred yards away.

At lunchtime, a friend called and asked Misty if she had heard about the shooting at the high school. Misty wasn't too concerned since it didn't seem like something her children would be involved in. Besides, she considered the school to be safe. Still, to make certain everything was all right, she called Brad to see if he had heard anything. Brad had gone home from work early because he was feeling sick.

A friend at work had given him the same news. From the house, he heard several pops outside and one or two booms, but he wasn't worried. He figured it was a prankster setting off firecrackers. After Misty and Brad hung up their phones, he went out back and looked over the fence and saw policemen everywhere. This was the beginning of 36 hours of hell for the parents.

By the time Misty got to Columbine, the place was swarming with desperate parents and relatives, bomb squads, police officers, reporters, and onlookers. There were many stories flying around, and the only thing they knew for sure was that two unidentified gunmen had gone on a rampage in the school. The families were sent to a nearby elementary school called Leawood, and when they couldn't fit any more people, the rest of the parents were sent to the public library. Nobody could go on campus at the school itself because it was blocked off by SWAT teams.

Lists of the students who were injured and safe were handed out as family members tried to find their children. Brad and Misty learned that Chris was all right, but they couldn't find Cassie. The last busload of students from the high school joined the parents at around 5:00 PM. They were told to go over to Leawood to meet it. It never came. By 9:30 PM, they still hadn't heard anything so they decided to go home.

Misty couldn't sleep that night. Every time she tried to fall asleep, she pictured Cassie huddled in the closet or bleeding to death in the hallway, calling for help. She wanted to go comfort her child. At 3:30 AM, she and Brad walked down to the corner to a spot where a sheriff's car was sitting. Brad asked for the truth, telling the driver that they



thought their daughter still in the school. He asked if anyone was alive. The driver told him that no one was left alive. Still, Misty wasn't ready to believe that. On Thursday, at 2 o'clock in the morning, the coroner called, saying they had Cassie's body.

From what Misty was told, she realized Cassie must have gone to the high school library around 11:15 AM. Cassie's friend Crystal was in the library, too. A teacher ran into the library telling the kids that students were in the hallway with guns. The kids weren't concerned since they figured it was just a senior prank. Another student came into the library, bleeding, and they realized that there really was a problem. They hid under the tables. The killers came in then suddenly left, and Crystal ran out the side door of the library. She made it out right before the killers came back in.

Gary, an investigator from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department and a member of the family's church told them that when he arrived at the school, he entered the library and saw Cassie. She had been shot in the head at very close range.

As time went by, Misty reflected on the times before Cassie died. She remembered how Chris and Cassie had taken a day off school to go snowboarding before she died. She reflected on prom night when Cassie and her friend Amanda decided to dress up and go out to a banquet at the Marriott where Amanda's mother worked. They did this because they didn't have dates. They went to the after prom party and had a lot of fun, coming in at six in the morning. One of the hardest parts of dealing with her daughter's death was the fact that the girl was at Columbine that day because the family had been trying to help keep her safe.

Chapter 2-Daddy's Girl

Cassie was born on November 6, 1981. She was killed when she was 17. Misty and Brad were married in August of 1980. Brad didn't want to have a baby at first, but six months after they were married, they found out they were pregnant. This upset him because he didn't really want to have a baby at that point in life. He wasn't very sensitive to Misty during her pregnancy, but when Cassie was born he felt like a new person. He was totally in love with his baby and his wife. He wanted to do everything for Cassie, and she constantly followed him around. He would take her for rides on his dirt bike when she was only six months old.

Brad remembered all the fun times they had together. She was a smart girl, and she loved to go swimming, fishing and rock climbing. Cassie had a typical childhood. It was full of happy memories, for which her parents were thankful when she hit her teen years.

While the memories were good, the dreams were horrible. Misty continued to have nightmares after Cassie's death. She kept dreaming that Cassie was in trouble and needed her help. She knew she had to face her fears head on so she visited the cemetery and went back to the school. She and Brad saw the bullet holes, the splattered blood and broken glass. They walked through hallways and rooms with



gaping holes and splintered furniture where the bombs has gone off. Still, even after they faced the horror, troubling events occurred.

At Cassie's memorial service, someone had brought a happy face balloon, and someone else had drawn a bullet hole on the balloon to make it look as if it had been shot. At the mall a young man wore a T-shirt with a disturbing message that was very cruel. Misty knew that the way to help herself get over the tragedy was to reach out to others who were also struggling.

Along with the bad dreams, Misty had good dreams as well. These dreams included ones of Cassie graduating and getting married, but the dreams would never be more than dreams. People told Misty that perhaps Cassie was fulfilling a divine plan. This thought gave her comfort, but she wished it wasn't her daughter who was used in the plan. She sometimes found herself angry at Brad since he seemed to cope with the death much more easily than she did.



3-4

3-4 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3 - murder, she wrote

Misty left her job in December of 1996. She had been working in the legal department at Lockheed Martin, and her contract was over. She wanted to spend more time with their children. Kathi seemed to be growing distant, and Chris's grades were slipping.

One day she was feeling down and remembered that Cassie had been given a teen Bible. She went into Cassie's room to look for it, but she also came across a stack of letters. The letters were from her friend Mona and were filled with horrible messages. Mona asked Cassie if she wanted to help murder a teacher, and the letters were filled with words and images of spells, knives, vampires, and mind altering mushrooms. In the letters Mona encouraged Cassie to kill her parents and had graphic images about this and murder on several letters.

Although most of the letters were written by Mona, the family learned that Cassie had written some of the letters as well. Experts point out that good parenting is good guidance. Misty understands that sometimes in spite of the best efforts of those around the child, a good child can go down a bad path.

There had been signs that something was amiss. In fifth and sixth grade, Cassie began neglecting other friends in order to spend more time with Mona, a girl who wouldn't look an adult in the eye. Still, Brad and Misty were just happy that their daughter had a close friend. In her teens, she listened to music her parents didn't approve of, and she became friends with a boy named Rick who was into satanism.

The school called the parents about Cassie's ditching classes, and her grades plummeted. They realized they were losing their daughter. Brad noticed occult symbols decorating art pieces. When Misty found the letters she and Brad turned to professionals for help. They notified Mona's mother, the sheriff's department, and their youth pastor at West Bowles Community Church (George).

Cassie flew into a rage when she learned that her parents had read the letters. She was upset that they had gone through her room, overstepping her right to privacy. Her parents were afraid for her. At the suggestion of the professionals, the parents brought Cassie to join other teens in the area at their youth service. She was very angry about this. The following weeks were horrible, and Cassie continually threatened to run away. She was full of anger and also threatened to kill herself. Sadness and depression surrounded her.

On New Year's Eve, Brad and Misty met with the investigator, a detective from the juvenile crime division, Mona and her parents. Mona's parents were openly hostile to them. The parents got a restraining order to keep Mona away from Cassie.



Misty was angry at Cassie, and she found it difficult to love her. She felt betrayed by her daughter. The parents decided not to let their daughter go back to her regular school and enrolled her in a private Christian school. They also began searching her room and belongings on a regular basis. The only activity they allowed Cassie to participate in was youth group.

Chapter 4-home front

Three weeks after Cassie was killed, a friend told them that Eric, one of the killers, had boasted about buying propane tanks, but nobody took him seriously. He used the tanks to try to blow up the cafeteria. Casual conversations regarding death and violence were so common in school that nobody took them seriously. Misty wondered if they had been too harsh with Cassie when they pulled her out of school. Now, in retrospect, she is confident that they made the right choice.

In 1997, there were several murders in their area in which teens killed parents. Later, Cassie admitted that her violent fantasies were more than talk. She had felt gripped by the power of darkness after she had given her soul to Satan. She wrote about this in an essay for her English class in her junior year. Her parents didn't see this essay until after she had been killed.

After two months of fighting with Cassie after finding the letters, Brad had a talk with Cassie. He reminded her of how important she was and how much they loved her. She was feeling trapped in her own home since she had to be under constant surveillance. She kept trying to sneak out. It was a tough time for the entire family.

Then Cassie began to make friends at her new school. Her old friends tried to get back in touch with her, but the parents were able to keep them away. One way they did this was by moving away from the neighborhood they loved so much.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 - u-turn

In the spring of 1997, Cassie told her parents that Jamie had invited her to a youth retreat. The parents weren't sure if she should go since they didn't know Jamie very well. Sending Cassie away for an entire weekend seemed very risky. They also knew that the church that was holding the event was a hellfire and brimstone church. In spite of their reservations, they allowed her to go.

Misty prayed for Cassie all weekend long, and she braced herself for the worst. The parents were unprepared for the effect the weekend had on Cassie. Jamie told the story from her point of view six weeks after Cassie was killed.

The youth group Jamie attended allowed kids to be themselves. There were all types of kids in the group from Goth the punk rockers. This was why she thought Cassie might feel comfortable in the group. When she heard about the retreat, she really wanted Cassie to go along as well. Cassie didn't want to go, but Jamie persuaded her.

Around 300 kids gathered up at Estes Park in the Rockies. They attended a nighttime praise and worship service with a theme of overcoming temptations of evil. When they started singing, Cassie seemed to change. She completely broke down and began crying. She talked to someone about the things she felt badly about and said she wanted to get them all up. A guy prayed for her.

After that weekend, Cassie told Jamie some of the things she had done and how she regretted it. She didn't want her brother to get into the same things she had. After that weekend, Cassie seemed more hopeful.

When Cassie got back from the trip, she went up to her mother, hugged her, and told her that she changed. Brad remembered that when she left she had been a "gloomy, head-down, say-nothing girl. But that day-the day she came back-she was bouncy and excited about what had happened to her."

Two years later, Cassie wrote an essay for English class highlighting that weekend. She wrote about free will and how on March 8, she turned her life around. At first Misty didn't believe the change had occurred. She thought that the new attitude might be a ploy. Instead, she discovered that it was a true change. Cassie treated her family with more respect, and her spirit changed. She seemed to have found a freedom that she didn't have before.

Chapter 6 - the trials of love



Becoming "born again" was a pivotal point in Cassie's life, but the time following it was just as important. Cassie now had a purpose in life along with hope. She began attending the youth group at West Bowles community church. The other kids made her feel welcome and accepted, and she began joining them on activities. Shauna, a youth leader at the church remembered how Cassie came in as a standoffish, insecure young lady. Another friend, Cassandra, spoke about how she had been intimidated by Cassie when she first showed up. Shauna said that eventually Cassie loosened up and became involved with activities. After a year or so, she asked Cassie what the youth group did for her. Cassie responded that even when she first started coming, she was impressed by the fact that everybody smiled. After the youth retreat, she began to smile as well.

At the end of the summer of 1997, Cathy's parents allowed her to transfer to Columbine High. She didn't really like the school she was in, and a good friend of hers had transferred to Columbine. Her parents warned her that she had to keep her grades up and stay away from the wrong crowds. Her new friends at Columbine knew about her faith, but she never drew attention to herself by just talking about it.

After her death, one fellow classmate said it didn't surprise her that Cassie died the way she did, but she was never pushy about her religion. She did remember one occasion when she asked Cassie what she was reading, and she discovered that Cassie had been reading the Bible at school.

Cassie had changed. Her obsession with death rock and vampires and self-mutilation changed to interest in photography, poetry and nature. She was particularly fond of Shakespeare's writing. In spite of the changes, she missed her old friends. She wished they could change like she had.

Cassie was very honest about her struggles. She had a hard time with her parents, and sometime she felt disconnected from God. She also struggled with self image. In 1998, Cassie wrote a letter to her friend Cassandra talking about how God had stood by her in her troubles. She wondered what her purpose was in life and how she could serve God. She wrote another letter in the fall of 1998 talking about how hard it was to give all she had to God.

Dave was impressed by the way Cassie remained in youth group by choice. In his opinion, she was struggling to fit in and contribute to the group. She made a note in some of her study guides to look to God's love for comfort rather than human love.

Misty wrote about how easy it would be to make Cassie into a saint, but in reality she was just as human as everybody else. She didn't seem to appreciate all her parents had done for her. She wrote letters about how difficult life was for her sometimes. Still, Cassie also reached out to others generously.



Chapters 7 - 8

Chapters 7 - 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 - dying we live

Within a day of the shootings at the high school, people began to call Cassie the "martyr of Littleton." They did this after hearing about her exchange with the boys who killed her. Her mother didn't know how to feel about that. According to its dictionary meaning, it was appropriate to call her a martyr. Still, her mom saw her as a typical teen. She was very proud of her daughter for not caving in to the killers and for sticking up for her morals. She wondered what she herself would have done in that situation. Still, she felt that her daughter would have hated being held up as an example.

Misty highlighted some of the other students who had stood up for their faith including Valeen Schnurr and Rachel Scott. That day, there were other acts of selflessness and bravery. Cassie would not have wanted to be elevated above the others. She was as real as anyone else.

Misty pointed out that whether people want to call Cassie a martyr or not, it wouldn't change the facts of her life. Her parents were happy to know that Cassie stood up for what she believed. To them, the real issue was about what enabled her to face the killers as she did. She remained courageous and calm and was ready to go, but they questioned why. After contemplation and talks with Dave, they realized that it was because she had given up her life to God when she became a Christian. She didn't fear death.

Chapter 8 - reflections

When death strikes so closely, it's impossible to keep living without your experiences changing the way you look at your life. Misty remembered how she told herself that if Cassie were safe, she would do everything she could to make sure Cassie's dreams came true. She talked about regrets and the conflicting emotions that came about after their daughter died.

At the memorial set up in Clement Park after the shootings, there were 15 crosses. For the victims, there were 13 crosses. Another two were there for the murderers, and this made some people very upset. Misty pointed out that anger is a destructive emotion that eats away any peace one might have. She talked about the concept of suing the parents of Cassie's murderers. She pointed out that any lawsuit would not bring back the dead children, and those parents lost children as well. Suing them would be cruel in her opinion.

About a month after Cassie died, Brad and Misty received a handwritten card in their mailbox from Sue and Tom Klebold. The couple apologized for the role their son had in

Cassie's death. Misty was impressed with the courage it must have taken to write and send the note. She realized how agonizing the entire situation must have been for them.

Both she and Brad were unprepared for the effect Cassie's death had on the world. They received letters from Europe, Australia, and South America. Of course, her death also had an impact on their community and on her brother. He determined to live up to her high regard of him.

The two were unusually close for siblings. Chris regretted how he treated her. He found poems she had written in a notebook, including one called, "My Brother." In that poem she had been hurt because he embarrassed her in front of his friends. He felt badly about that. After she died, he went through his CDs and got rid of the ones with negative messages. He also tried to be kinder and less judgmental.

After Cassie's death, people stopped in to check on the family. Misty reflected on the gifts in life. She thought about violence in society and the importance of relationships. Misty said she would always feel the pain of her daughter's death, but she also was able to see it as a victory - a triumph of courage and honesty.



Characters

Cassie

Cassie was 17 years old when she was shot and killed during school. She had a happy childhood but became involved with the wrong friends when she was in fifth grade. Gradually, she pulled away from her other friends. By the time she was in her teens, she was sullen and angry. She offered her soul to Satan. Her friends and she talked about murdering a teacher they disliked, and her friends told her to kill her own parents. When her parents found out about this, they made her go to a different school and put her under surveillance. This caused her to threaten suicide and running away. On a youth group retreat, she suddenly changed. She became a Christian and turned to God. She was killed when she was asked if she believed in God, and she said "yes."

Misty

Misty is Cassie's mother. She wrote this novel and didn't hold back on the struggles in her relationship with her daughter. She worked for Lockheed Martin, but she stopped working because she wanted to be there for her children. Dealing with Cassie left her feeling lost. When she discovered the letters in Cassie's room, she went to the church for help. She prayed through all the tough times her family faced. Still, she wasn't sure she would have had the courage Cassie had when held at gunpoint.

Misty has a close relationship with her husband, but has a hard time understanding how he could cope with Cassie's death so well. She had thought long and hard about the events and determined that fighting the evil in the world with retaliation would be detrimental. The best way to reach out and make things better would be to reach out to others with kindness.

Brad

Brad is Cassie's father. He didn't want children until the moment Cassie was born, but she stole his heart. The two were very close when she was young.

Chris

Chris is Cassie's brother. The two were very close.

Mona

Mona is the pseudonym for a girl with whom Cassie became friends. She encouraged Cassie to kill a teacher and kill her parents.



Rick

Cassie became friends with a boy named Rick. His school said there was nothing they could do with him. He was involved in satanic rituals.

Gary

Gary is an investigator from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department and a member of the family's church. He told them that Cassie had been shot at close range and died immediately.

George

George is the youth pastor at West Bowles Community Church. He helped Cassie get involved in youth group activities.

Eric

Eric was one of the gunmen. He bragged about getting propane tanks, but nobody paid much attention.

Jamie

Jamie befriended Kathy at the Christian school. She invited her to the youth event that changed Cassie's life.

Shauna

Shauna was a youth leader. She remembered the changes that occurred in Cassie over time.

Cassandra

Cassandra was once intimidated by Cassie. She got to know her better, and the two became friends who shared letters.

Klebolds

The Klebolds wrote a note to Misty and Brad apologizing for their son's role in their daughter's death.

Marilyn Manson

Marilyn Manson was the singer Cassie listened to when she was involved in Satanism.



Objects/Places

Columbine High School

Cassie attended Columbine High School. It was where she was shot and killed.

Leawood Elementary School

Leawood Elementary School is one of the two places parents were sent to after the shootings.

The Public Library

The Public Library is one of the two places parents were sent to after the shootings.

Lockheed Martin

Misty worked at Lockheed Martin before she found disturbing letters in Cassie's room.

Letters

Misty found letters filled with talk of murder, spells and satanic images in Cassie's room.

West Bowles Community Church

Cassie began attending youth group at West Bowles Community Church.

Estes Park

Estes Park is where Cassie went on the youth retreat that changed her life. It is in the Rockies.

Youth Group

Youth Group was the gathering of a group of kids. At first, Cassie didn't fit in, but later she joined activities and smiled as she attended.



Poem

Chris found a poem telling about a time he embarrassed his sister.

Hand-written letter

Misty and Brad found a hand-written letter in their mailbox from the Klebolds.

Crosses

Crosses were set up as a memorial. It angered some that there was a memorial for the killers as well as the victims.

Clement Park

A temporary memorial that angered some people was set up in Clement Park.

Music

Chris determined to get rid of all of his music with negative messages after his sister was killed.

Themes

Dealing With Unexpected Death

Death is always difficult to deal with, but the unexpected death of a young person is more difficult to handle for many. Death that results from violence is even worse, and multiple deaths resulting from violence even worse still. The massacre at Columbine High School affected people around the globe. For the family of Cassie Bernall, the violence was extremely personal. Their daughter was shot at close range, dying after she was asked if she believed in God, and she answered "yes."

The family members heard about the shootings and didn't know if their son and daughter were safe. After a few hours they discovered their son, Chris, was safe, but they hadn't heard anything about their daughter Cassie. The wait was agonizing as kids from the school were bused in to parents. By the end of the day, Cassie still hadn't shown up, but the parents weren't told what was going on. After 30 hours, the family learned that Cassie really was dead.

As they made funeral arrangements, the family looked back on her life. Misty, her mother, was thankful for the changes that occurred in her daughter in the last few years of her life even as she questioned whether the family choices led to her daughter's death.

Some might have lashed out at the family of the killers, but Misty and her husband felt that the unexpected deaths of their own sons was tragic. She felt that harshness in life must be responded to with kindness.

The Importance of Parenting Well

Misty, Cassie's mother, talks about the difficulties of parenting. After the massacre at Columbine High School, people wondered why the parents of the killers hadn't picked up on the clues their sons gave regarding their attraction to violence. Misty understood how difficult parenting was since she went through a tough time with her own children, especially Cassie.

It wasn't until after she accidentally discovered letters in Cassie's room that Misty learned that her daughter was heavily enmeshed in the occult and talking about murdering a teacher. As she and her husband banded together to help their daughter, Misty often felt at a loss. She felt that she was too restrictive at times and butted heads with her daughter. Cassie felt the same way. They family found letters after her death citing how difficult Cassie thought her mother was.

Even though times were tough in the family relations, each family member seemed to realize they were working for the best out of love. Misty was amazed at the parents of the girl who wrote letters to Cassie encouraging her to kill her parents. The other mother



didn't seem to care, even when the police mentioned that they hadn't seen anything that bad in all their years of work. The mother had no regard for the restraining order and helped her daughter try to connect once again with Cassie.

Misty was grateful for the fact that by the time Cassie died, the family had been a unit for a while. They had sorted out differences, and Cassie was at peace.

The Impact of Religion

Religion is very key in this book. The very title stems from the fact that Cassie said "yes" about believing in God before she was shot. Other students who claimed a belief in God were also targeted during the massacre at Columbine High School that day. However, Cassie wasn't always so strong in her faith.

She caused her parents great concern because she had given herself to Satan when she was younger. She had drifted away from her friends, bonding with another girl who encouraged her negative thoughts. Cassie listened to the violent music of Marilyn Manson—the same music appreciated by her future killers. She became depressed and suicidal, considering murdering others.

Her mother was a Christian. She found the letters in Cassie's room while looking for a Bible then went to a youth pastor for help. She surrounded her home and her daughter with prayer, and she and her husband sent Cassie to a Christian school.

Cassie turned her life over to God after attending a youth retreat. She seemed more at peace after the event. She didn't go crazy witnessing to others, yet it didn't surprise her classmates to learn that she died after sticking to her beliefs. One girl remembered a time when she saw Cassie reading a book in school. She asked Cassie what the book was and discovered it was the Holy Bible.

Style

Perspective

This book is written by Misty Bernal. She is Cassie's mother and was there, waiting for her daughter to come home the day she was killed. She was part of the story, but also knew the story of Cassie's past. Misty had a unique understanding of how her daughter might have related to her own killers. She had access to Cassie's private notes and records as well as to those closets to Cassie in life. She began writing the book within weeks of her daughter's death.

Tone

The story is written from a first person subjective point-of-view. This gives the reader insight into facts as well as what the author was thinking in the past and after Cassie's death.

Throughout the book, there are written comments from other important people in Cassie's life such as her father, her brother, a youth worker and a friend. The book also highlighted some of the things Cassie herself had written in journals, letters, and books before her death.

Although it was subjective, Misty didn't shy away from harsh realities. She was blunt about times where her parenting might have pushed Cassie away. She was also blunt in defining how she felt about the killers and their families.

Structure

She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernal by Misty Bernal opens with a page of dedication to Cassie and to the others who died as well as others related to the trauma. This is followed by an image of Cassie and a quote from a note she wrote the night before she was killed.

The table of contents shows that the novel is comprised of an introduction, a foreword, eight chapters, and an afterword. The chapters average between 20 and 25 pages, although the sixth chapter is 32 pages and the seventh chapter is 14 pages. Each chapter begins with an image and a quote as well as a word or phrase representing something significant in the chapter. The titles of the chapters are written in lowercase letters. There is a place for journal entries at the very end of the book.



Quotes

"Honestly, I want to live completely for God. It's hard and scary, but totally worth it."
Book opening

"Doctors say that brain forgets pain, and that may be so. I am not sure the heart forgets."
Chapter 1, page 16

"Now that she's gone, though, I've begun to realize the significance of every moment you spend with your child."
Chapter 2, page 29

"In any case, the letters in our possession made it clear that even if she did not bear the main responsibility for committing murderous fantasies to paper, our daughter was at the very least a willing accomplice."
Chapter 3, page 47

"Years later we wondered whether we hadn't missed an important cue in failing to see the connection between emotions expressed in these songs, and Cassie's own internal battles."
Chapter 3, page 52

"I stopped trying to please Cassie and make her like me, and I started trying to guide her more consistently. Unbelievably, instead of rebelling, she accepted the boundaries that I set for her and even seems grateful for them."
Chapter 4, page 81

"'Until God has taken possession of you, you cannot have faith, but only simple belief, and it hardly matters whether or not you have such a belief, because you can arrive at faith equally well through disbelief.' Simone Weill"
Chapter 5, page 88

"When she left she had still been this gloomy, head-down, say-nothing girl. But that day—the day she came back—she was bouncy and excited about what had happened to her."
Chapter 5, page 93

"Cassie underlined only a solitary sentence: 'All of us should live life so as to be able to face eternity at any time.'"
Chapter 6, page 122



"It is easy to die for Christ. It is hard to live for him."
Chapter 7, page 130

"She may have been 17, but she's a far stronger woman than I'll ever be."
Chapter 7, page 132

"When death strikes as close as it did to us, it's almost impossible to go on without a change in the way you look at your life."
Chapter 8, page 145

"That is why I am able, ultimately, to see the loss of my daughter not so much as a defeat, but as a victory."
Chapter 8, page 159

"My death is not my own, but yours, and its significance depends on what you do with it."
Chapter 8, page 160



Topics for Discussion

What is the significance of the title of this book?

Why did the family still cling to hope after students were killed?

What was Cassie like when she was friends with Mona, before her mother found the letters?

What was so alarming about the letters?

What steps did Cassie's parents take to help her escape from her troubled past?

How did the youth group experiences change Cassie?

Describe the relationship between Cassie and Chris, defining how they affected each other.

How did Misty feel about the killers and their families?