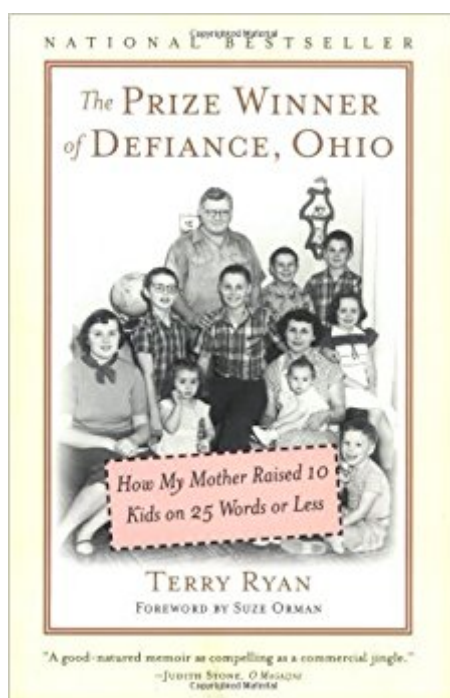


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# The Prize Winner Of Defiance, Ohio: How My Mother Raised 10 Kids On 25 Words Or Less



## Synopsis

The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio introduces Evelyn Ryan, an enterprising woman who kept poverty at bay with wit, poetry, and perfect prose during the "contest era" of the 1950s and 1960s. Evelyn's winning ways defied the church, her alcoholic husband, and antiquated views of housewives. To her, flouting convention was a small price to pay when it came to raising her six sons and four daughters. Graced with a rare appreciation for life's inherent hilarity, Evelyn turned every financial challenge into an opportunity for fun and profit. The story of this irrepressible woman, whose clever entries are worthy of Erma Bombeck, Dorothy Parker, and Ogden Nash, is told by her daughter Terry with an infectious joy that shows how a winning spirit will always triumph over poverty.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the 1950s, the Ryan family struggled to make ends meet. Ten kids and a father who spent most of his paycheck on booze drained the family's meager finances. But mom Evelyn Ryan, a former journalist, found an ingenious way to bring in extra income: entering contests on the backs of cereal boxes and the like. The author, Evelyn's daughter, tells the entertaining story of her childhood and her mother's contest career with humor and affection. She is not a professional narrator, but her love and admiration for her mother come through in every sentence. Evelyn won supermarket shopping sprees that put much-needed food on the table, provided washing machines and other appliances the family couldn't afford, and delivered cash to pay the mounting pile of bills. This well-told, suspenseful tale is peppered with examples of Evelyn's winning poems and slogans,

taken from the years of notebooks that she saved and passed on to her daughter, and has a fiction-worthy climax that will keep listeners laughing even as they're glued to Ryan's tale. Simultaneous release with the Simon & Schuster hardcover (Forecasts, Feb. 5). Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School-While her sometimes abusive husband drank away a third of his weekly take-home pay, Evelyn Ryan kept her ever-growing family afloat by entering every contest she came across, beginning with Burma Shave roadside-sign jingles. In post-World War II America, money, appliances, food, excursions-anything you could think of-were routinely offered to the person who sent in the best jingle, essay, or poem, accompanied, of course, by the company's box-top or other product identification. Although she more often won prizes of products, such as a case of Almond Joy candy bars, Mrs. Ryan once won enough for a down payment on a house just as her family was being turned out of their two-bedroom rental house. That contest also won her a bicycle for her son. She entered so many contests, often several times under different forms of her name, that hardly a week went by without some prize being delivered by the postman. Charmingly written by one of her 10 children, this story is not only a chronicle of contesting, but also of her mother's irrepressible spirit. With a sense of humor that wouldn't quit, she found fun in whatever life sent her way, and passed that on to all her children who, despite the poverty they grew up in, lived and still live happy, useful lives. YAs who like family stories should love this winning account. Sydney Hausrath, Kings Park Library, Burke, VA Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

To think that until the last year I had never heard of Defiance, Ohio or of the Ryan family, and now I've fallen in love with the family, especially the indomitable mom. I reconnected with a former classmate via classmates.com who lives in Defiance. While volunteering with some church friends, I told a friend about my new email friend from Defiance. She told me that her husband lived in Defiance at one time. The next thing I knew she was giving me the dvd about the Ryan family. I watched it and was so moved--I cried and cried. It was hard for me to laugh, though. I then knew that I definitely wanted to read the book. I looked forward to getting back to the book every day even though it seemed like it was one jingle after another! We get to read her winning jingles and all the ones that didn't win. This was interesting but I felt as though I needed a break from the contest routine. I needed more about the children (they were fleshed out a little but not a lot). It was

interesting to read about their house and all the broken appliances and the mom's ingenuity when it came to coping with them. Can you imagine not having a handle on your refrigerator door? I will admit that I wanted to hear more about her alcoholic father's rages, but she is very discreet when it comes to focusing on her dad's shortcomings. Now I'm thinking that she was right to take the focus away from him and to concentrate on her absolutely wonderful, amazing, ingenious mom who kept the family afloat with her prize-winning contest entries. I cried at the end. It was illuminating for me to find that some of the scenes in the movie were exactly how they happened. Sometimes when I was watching the movie, I was thinking that a particular incident couldn't have really happened but sure enough it did. The father was interesting in that he was terribly violent but he'd snap out of his rages and become gentle again. I kept thinking that some of the occurrences wouldn't have happened with my father who could be violent without any alcohol to fuel him but whom we would have been afraid to challenge verbally and physically as the Ryan family does with their head of family. This dad is like a lion and a mouse all in one. He's remorseful after many of his blow-ups. I guess if he'd been worse the family wouldn't have been as happy as they were. They became such a resilient family--the children learned from their mother about resourcefulness and survival techniques. In order to understand this book, you have to know more about the fifties when so many moms were out of the work force, taking care of home and family, and often not even being able to drive a car. My mom didn't drive when I was growing up. She was our mainstay--always home when we got home from school. Gave me a very secure feeling. The book is a treasure because it's a relic in many ways--it's a tale from a bygone era and for me it was inspiring and amazing and beautiful. So glad Terry Ryan shared this story before her untimely passing.

I enjoyed the movie and decided to read the book when I saw it on sale. I'm glad I read this well written, interesting and optimistic book. It amazes me that it's a true story. The "prize winner" is a smart and industrious housewife with 10 children and an alcoholic husband. It's up to her to take care of the family and make sure they have food on the table and a roof over their heads. This book is really a love letter to a mother by a daughter and you can see why. In another time, this smart, clever, persistent and imaginative woman could've had a highly successful career in any number of fields but in this era, women didn't have as many options, birth control wasn't as available and times were tough. Somehow she managed to win enough cash and other prizes to consistently keep the family afloat for decades. I really wanted to see what her winning entries were and this book is filled with them. What impresses me most about this

incredibly impressive woman and family is her endless optimism and their enviable closeness. Most of us would've succumbed to despair and poverty feeling overwhelmed by the constant obstacles presented with maintaining such a large family and dealing with an unpredictable alcoholic. It's remarkable to me that it seems as if the kids never felt deprived of attention or love. Evelyn Ryan must've had an incredible amount of energy, steadfast faith in herself and a will of iron to remain so wonderfully optimistic and determined. Not to mention a big dose of luck. I don't know how she did it but I'm in awe.~

I have a confession to make. When one of the girls in my bookclub recommended this book for our September read, I silently groaned. I thought this was another one of those books that would be dry and witless ~~ and a waste of my money (not to mention, my time!). I am very very happy to report that I was indeed wrong about this book. This is definitely one of the best reads I've read this summer. (I know, I know, I keep saying that lately with all of my books, but honestly, this is really one of the best reads ever!) Terry Ryan writes with humor and prose about her mother raising ten children in the little midwestern town, called, Defiance, in Ohio. Evelyn is not your typical mother. She doesn't stay home and bake cakes all the time. No, this is one woman who really defines the word "mother" in all its best definitions. Evelyn is a woman of bravery and wit who, in the face of daunting circumstances, decides to enter contests to earn a little money on the side to support her ever-growing family. She hides the food in the dryer and forgets they're there too ~~ that is just one of many humorous incidents in the Ryan household. She writes rhymes for contests and poetry. She thinks of ways to earn an extra dollar that her husband's job doesn't cover. There are some dark spots in this book ~~ Evelyn is married to an alcoholic who squanders away most of his paycheck on drink. There have been a few abusive incidents reported in the book ~~ not to garner self-pity, but as a fact of life in the Ryan household. Evelyn shows her strength and courage in the way she deals with her children, the adversity in their lives and always with grace and love. She meets up with other women who love to enter contests as well and this is a loving tribute from a daughter to her mother. Ryan writes convincingly and beautifully. This is a story that tells of a by-gone era that I am not even familiar with. My husband, on the other hand, is very familiar with the contests and can say some of the sayings from memory. This book is a journey down memory lane as well. Defiance is not the same town as it was back in the 50s and 60s. It was nice reading about the streets that have become very familiar to me and it gives the reader a nice sense of history in "Everytown, USA" ~~ when downtown was the main hub of activity before the urban sprawl came

along and took the businesses out of the downtown. This is a story I highly recommend everyone to read ~~ mothers, daughters, sons, fathers ~~ everyone. It's a great piece of history and a wonderful tribute to a woman who never gave up hope even in the midst of troubling times. This is definitely one of my favorite reads of the year! 7-30-04

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