

# The Bookish Elf



## Book Review: Losing the Atmosphere by Vivian Conan

**Author:** Vivian Conan

**Genre:** Memoir

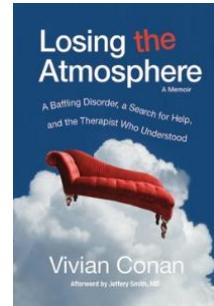
**First Publication:** 2020

**Language:** English

**Narration:** First person

## Book Summary: Losing the Atmosphere by Vivian Conan

Born in 1940s Brooklyn to a father prone to rages and an emotionally erratic mother, Vivian Conan grew up in two different worlds: Outside and Inside. Outside, she had friends, excelled in school, and was close to her cousins and younger brother. Inside, she saw faces that weren't her own in her bedroom mirror and was surrounded by an invisible Atmosphere that bathed her in the love and understanding she craved. Moving between these worlds without knowledge or control enabled Vivian to survive her childhood but limited her ability to live fully as an adult. To others, her life seemed to brim with work, friends, music, and boyfriends. But her mind and soul were filled with chaos and pain. Neither she nor her therapists could figure out why.



**Losing the Atmosphere** is Vivian Conan's riveting account of her journey toward self-understanding and wholeness; her encounters with a string of more and less helpful therapists; and her unconventional relationship with the therapist who was finally able to guide her through the courageous, messy work healing required.

Told with uncommon honesty, humor, and grace, **Losing the Atmosphere** is a never-too-late story about the growth possible for anyone with the guts and determination to pursue it, and a testament to the redemptive power of love: not the perfect kind Vivian experienced in her imaginary world, but the imperfect kind that connects us, flawed human being to flawed human being, in the real world she lives in now.

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Sometimes, our minds can't even begin to comprehend what is happening, and so to protect ourselves, a darker place is created where we can hide. But when these dark places are too deep – the damage is so severe – we can't always find our way back out, so alternate realities take over. I can certainly see how the mind of a child so young could split (even multiple times), and how her true self left entirely.

**Losing the Atmosphere** by Vivian Conan is a very fascinating and at times very disturbing book but not necessarily an easy one to read, I should say that upfront. Previously known as multiple personality disorder, [Dissociative Identity Disorder](#) is the topic of much speculation and glamorization through the movies and other avenues, but is quite compelling when you look at the actual case studies. It took me almost a month to read it. This story of a woman with dissociative identity disorder, purportedly based on real life, hooked me at the time of reading it.

**Losing the Atmosphere** is the courageous account of Vivian Conan's experiences with Dissociative Identity Disorder and the understanding of how her experiences led to its development. In the book, she tells her story of how she endured an abusive, neglectful childhood, and created distinct dissociative identity as a coping mechanism to shield herself from the physical and mental pain she endured. In the course of her life, she learned of the existence of another identity, and in addressing it she endured many heartaches. Yet, in the process, she was also able to achieve much in her career and form healthy relationships that brought her joy and comfort. She was also able to come to terms with her experiences as she tells of the rocky road getting there through this book.

I don't think I can put words to say how much this book touched me in its narrative. I felt for Vivian in her personal reflections through her experiences and on the road through her recovery. She gives an open, articulate account, showing a resilience in her narrative while at the same time reflecting on moments where she was vulnerable. I think its the kind of memoir that will resonate for a long time with its readers and show that it is possible to find a road to survival. It's a wonderfully touching, engrossing story, and I highly admire her courage and eloquence in telling it. I'm glad she wrote it, glad I read it.

However, it is hardly a feel-good book. I am very picky about what I read—language, lewd detail, violence. There was a great deal of abuse, violence and lewd details, simply because of the nature of the subject, and I found this difficult to read. Some of the material will always haunt me and make me ill every time I think about it. But I don't regret reading it. These horrible things really did happen, and they happen to other people, too, and while I prefer subjects of a more uplifting nature, I'm not going to hide my face and plug my ears and chant nonsense words when I'm confronted with it.

I really felt so much sympathy towards Vivian, I can only imagine the utter terror she felt. Vivian Conan does a really good job of making you feel what she is going through and I think that's what makes this book so riveting. As a case study, I think, people will always be reluctant to believe that parents are capable of doing great harm to their own children if so inclined. I would recommend this book to people with a penchant for [reading memoirs](#) or for those that like to read about abnormal psychology.

BY ADMIN      AUGUST 18, 2020