The Girl With The Crooked Smile: Stuck in a Moment... and the Pearls of Wisdom that Pulled Her Through It
By: Darah Zeledon  (Sterling Publishing Group, 2013)
Reviewed by: Ginny Sparrow

Sometimes the loss of a loved one by suicide is the defining tragedy in a person's life. There's a “before” and an “after.” There's a “New Normal” that many survivors experience. But sometimes a person's life can become messy, complicated, and full of simple bad luck; the suicide is just one drop in a bucket of overflowing tears. Such is the adult life of Darah Zeledon. While she was pregnant, Zeledon had to have brain surgery to remove a growing tumor. Soon after she crossed that hurdle, and while living out of the U.S. in Panama, she received the call that so many survivors have experienced: she learned that her younger brother, who she knew was struggling with his career path following college graduation, had taken his life.

Given the responsibilities of motherhood, post-surgical healing, and navigating life in a foreign country, Zeledon had little time or space to grieve; a soul can take only so much.

As she pushed forward with a dose of denial, she encountered more struggles, and she recounted her path to learning how to not just survive but thrive in the face of adversity in her simple-to-read memoir, Girl with the Crooked Smile; the title refers to the first of many storms she weathered in a ten-year span.

Many survivor memoirs center on the loss of a loved one to suicide or the author’s suicide attempt story. Surviving suicide is enough to fill many books, after all. What was, dare I say, refreshing about Girl with the Crooked Smile, is that Zeledon does not just address suicide loss. She faces a range of trials and tribulations, and she doesn't always handle it perfectly. It's a process, and she learns that she fortunately receives many second chances. At the end of each chapter, she shares the lessons she learned by reflecting on the coping skills she used in each crisis. For example:

- Fight like hell until you can't fight anymore.
- Preserve childlike innocence and take comfort in illusions if it preserves sanity.
- Maintain dignity.
- Stay actively engaged in life.

It was thoroughly enjoyable to get to know the Girl with the Crooked Smile (note: the title is reflective of not one, but two injuries necessitating multiply surgeries that permanently changed her appearance). Zeledon has a strong presence in social media and is considered a warrior in social media circles and on her website, www.DarahZeledon.com. Her resolve will inspire surely inspire many survivors.