

# Literary Speaking

**Fever** By Mary Beth Keane

*Reviewed by Dana Yanez-Soria, Yankton Community Library*

Most people have probably heard of typhoid fever, but because it is not as prevalent in our world today, many people may not know a lot about it. Typhoid

fever is a common, sometimes fatal, disease that is transmitted by the ingestion of food or water that has been contaminated by the feces of an infected person. Poor sanitation and personal hygiene greatly affect the spread of typhoid fever. Some of the symptoms of the disease may include high fever, delirium, intestinal hemorrhaging, rose-colored spots on the chest and abdomen and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). In the past, typhoid fever has had some devastating effects, taking many lives throughout history.

Fever by Mary Beth Keane is an historical fiction novel giving light to Mary Mallon's side of the story. The book introduces us to a young, clever, strong-willed Irish immigrant with a desire to improve her lot in life and a great passion for cooking.

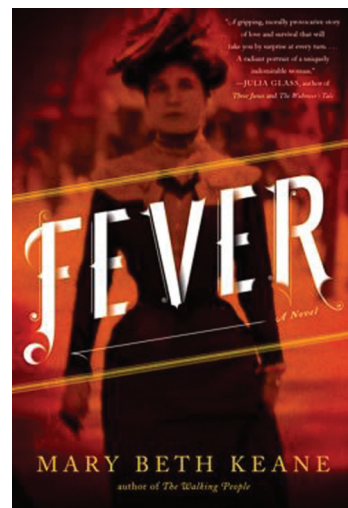
In 1907, the ill-fated Mary Mallon, also known as Typhoid Mary, was arrested in New York when she was suspected of being a healthy carrier of the disease. She was treated like a common criminal when a doctor noticed a trail of the illness wherever Mary had been employed as a cook.

After being torn from her life and thrown into isolation in a sanitarium on North Brother Island, separated from everyone and everything she knew, she was determined not to go down without a fight. She stubbornly maintained that she was innocent and disease-free. After three years in isolation, the doctors and lawyers involved gave Mary an ultimatum, either give up her career as a cook forever or have her gall bladder removed. Having the gall bladder removed was and still is a widely accepted treatment for chronic typhoid infections. Eventually agreeing that she would never again cook for other people, she was released from the hospital on North Brother Island. Entering back into the world, she struggled to pick up her life where she left off.

Today, cases of typhoid fever have greatly

decreased due to advances in medical technology and vaccinations. While reading *Fever*, you find yourself understanding that the doctors that apprehend Mary are truly trying to learn more about the disease and to protect the general public. However, your heart can't help but go out to Mary during her struggles. She has an unfortunate knack of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

At times, the writing in this book was a bit slow, but overall I found this to be a very interesting book. I learned many details about typhoid and about Mary Mallon that I had never known before. I truly enjoyed Mary's passion, grit, and determination. Throughout the book you will discover just how clever and strong-willed she really was.



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