ForeWord Reviews

FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

A Suburban Mom: Notes from the Asylum
Meredith O'Brien
Jana Christy, illustrator
Wyatt-MacKenzie
978-1-932279-51-1
(January 2007)

Young mothers who feel that American culture is sending them "all the wrong messages about motherhood" will find a dose of camaraderie from this book. The author aims, humorously, to dispel tired suburban-mom myths, combining one part of her own mothering experiences with another part of her observations on popular culture's judgments and expectations.

A Suburban Mom compiles a series of O'Brien's columns previously published in Boston's *Parents & Kids* magazine, organized by subject, including sections on: "Motherhood, etc.," "Pregnancy, Birth, and Other Bloody Things," "Growing Pains," "On the Home Front," and "Random Ramblings." The length of the essays is in keeping with the likely reader's daily reading availability—they are short and succinct in their language and messages.

O'Brien is a former political reporter for *The Boston Herald* and *The Union-News*; she understands how to get to her topic quickly. Her essays cover the time period in her life from the birth of her twins through sending three children to elementary school. She takes herself in stride, and most of the humor is at her own expense. When she relays her experiences as a mother of toddler twins, readers will get a sense of her desperation for time alone. She confesses that her internal nickname for her children became "The Vultures" and that she sometimes resorted to desperate measures in order to find time to eat or bathe: "Yes, I hide from my kids, quite often actually."

With such self-deprecation, O'Brien acknowledges the sting that judgments from others can sometimes bring, and in so doing, she provides a safe haven for others with self-doubt about their parenting skills. Of her early penchant for detailed written directions for babysitters, she says: "My mother thought that the whole directions business was so entertaining that she put the list of instructions in her photo album."

O'Brien is at her best when she's describing her own personal but universal experiences with her audience: "A mommy's locked bathroom is her castle." She's less effective when her references are culturally topical and specific, such as her observations on currently popular

television shows.

This book's short essays will appeal to harried mothers looking for relief from the sometimes claustrophobic world of parenting young children. In *A Suburban Mom*, readers will find both humor and reprieve from the outside world's views on their daily lives.

Chris Arvidson