

A View from My Window

Sylvia Forrest

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“Pour a cup of coffee, make yourself comfortable, and I’ll introduce you to some of my favorite women.” With these words of welcome, Sylvia Forrest invites readers into her life through an engaging and heartwarming collection of essays, *A View from My Window*.

Organized into three sections entitled “Womanhood,” “Motherhood,” and “Grandmothers,” Forrest’s stories explore her own life as well as the lives of other women she has known, from youth to maturity and everything in between. Whether discussing the challenges of marriage and parenting or the trials of school years and beyond, the collection never falters, engaging readers effectively from start to finish.

In the first section, Forrest shares tales of mismatched roommates and partners, first forays into forming sisterly bonds with other women, and the journey every woman takes as she begins to learn herself and her limits. In “A Friend in Need (Becomes a Friend Indeed),” she explores the more mature and occasionally unexpected friendships that are often forged in college dorms, and the way they can shape lives and change views. Comparing different types of friendships to junk food or vegetables, she writes, “As for Kelli, I may have felt stuck with her at first, but she turned out to be spinach. She made me strong.”

The collection’s second part explores the adventures of motherhood, and Forrest doesn’t hold back on revealing the sometimes tough truths and challenges that go along with raising a family. From learning lessons about judging other parents to dealing with the guilt of an occasional lack of enthusiasm for repetitive school events, the stories are candid and contain a thread of subtle humor that is sure to resonate with readers. As Forrest states at the beginning of the section, “One thing about motherhood: you can always do better.”

Forrest focuses on grandmothers in the final section of the book. Whether bold and brassy or quiet and conservative, grandmothers often play considerable roles in women’s lives, a sentiment the author conveys through several heartfelt stories. In “Spoons and Pages,” Forrest offers insight into her relationship with Grandma Sadie, who collected spoons to chronicle her own travels just as painstakingly as she pulled together pages of an album showcasing her granddaughter’s life. The lasting significance of their relationship inspires Forrest to dig up those albums, “not out of vanity, but to receive the love and acceptance tucked under the plastic of every page.”

It can be challenging to write an autobiographical work with the appropriate amount of distance required to present stories effectively, but Forrest nails it in every section of her book. Her tone is conversational and warm, a style which is consistently maintained throughout each essay. She serves as the thread connecting each tale, but she is not necessarily the main character. The dialogue is natural and the writing flows smoothly, never losing the reader’s interest. Editing is flawless, and Forrest’s own viewpoints (offered at the end of the essays) are interspersed seamlessly.

A View from My Window is a warm, wise, and exceptionally well-written compilation of stories, one that is sure to strike a chord with every woman, no matter what stage of her life she happens to be navigating.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (October 17, 2012)

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