ForeWord Reviews

FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

A Winner by Any Standard: A Personal Growth Journey for Every American Teen
Rob Garofalo Jr.
Teen Winners Publishing
978-0-9740356-4-2
(January 2004)

Parents tend to advise their teens with simple declarations, such as “Believe in yourself” and “Be more positive,” says the author. But that’s where the advice often ends; how are teens supposed to figure out practical applications to that wise advice in their own lives?

In this book, teens will find a weekly study to help them take advice and transform it into hands-on activities and thought processes designed to implement that advice in their daily lives. The book is divided into fifty-two short chapters, each covering one concept (Knowing What You Stand For, Respecting Your Money, Becoming a Leader) and discussing it through personal examples from the author’s life, an examination of the impact the concept can have, and suggestions for developing a plan to benefit from the advice.

Garofalo (or Mr. G., as he’s known to his students), a teacher from Berlin, Connecticut, is a past congressional scholarship recipient and winner of the state Teacher of the Year award. He has designed and presented, to parents and fellow teachers, several condescending in tone; it accomplishes the difficult task of making vague advice concrete and attainable.

Combining his own personal experiences as a teen with incidents he’s witnessed as a teacher, as well as headline-making stories such as the tragedy at Columbine, Garofalo speaks directly to readers in a conversational style, interpreting advice and clarifying it where needed: “We are each responsible for our own actions. It’s been preached countless times before but most often when someone is already facing a serious consequence. Well, if I had my way, the expression of choice would be changed to: We are each responsible for anticipating the outcomes of our actions.” The linguistic difference is small but significant: he asks teens to think about consequences before putting themselves in the position of experiencing consequences.

Garofalo’s writing style, for the most part, is accessible and confident. His only misstep is in frequently addressing chapters to “my student,” which gives the beginning paragraphs a slightly more parental tone than might be acceptable to some teens. But the use of shorter

chapters, concrete examples, and a final summarizing paragraph make the book easy to follow and engaging to read.

The book is designed to be used over the course of a year, not an onerous task for even the busiest teen. While some chapters will be more relevant than others, any teen who undertakes the journey outlined in this book will, indeed, become a winner by any standard.

Amy Rea