

Blissful Thinking: A Memoir of Overcoming the Wellness Revolution

L. L. Kirchner

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L. L. Kirchner's snarky memoir *Blissful Thinking* covers her search for validation in all the wrong places.

After early-onset menopause prevented her from starting a family, Kirchner and her husband went to Qatar for her work, hoping to breathe new life into their marriage. But when her husband filed for divorce, she found herself stranded in a country that was unwelcoming to soon-to-be-divorced women. Struggling to deal with the devastation of rejection and floundering for a new direction, Kirchner feared a relapse into addiction. To stay on her feet, she went on a quest to find out why she believed herself incapable of being loved.

Kirchner's travels took her to India, where she visited meditation centers and sex cults catering to disillusioned Westerners. The book's coverage of her travel preparations hints at some counterintuitive connections, though—to real estate investments, book deals, support networks, and strong friendships that grate against her proclaimed search for validation, purpose, and security.

In all, the book covers subjects including death, divorce, privilege, and the wellness industry. Kirchner recalls how, after her mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she was forced to return home to confront the haunting family relationships and small-town experiences that turned her into a child addict. She also applies irreverent humor to dissecting the New Age industry, which is accused of promising to solve a person's problems through half-baked mashups of Eastern philosophy and Western capitalism.

Blissful Thinking is an entertaining memoir about how preoccupations with the "meaning of life" obscure everyday appreciation. Turning her discerning eye inward, Kirchner lays bare the privilege of being a white Westerner who can pay to appropriate other cultures in search of what is right in front of her all along.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (September / October 2023)

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