ForeWord Reviews
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SELF-HELP

Challenging Choices: Welcome Life's Invitations to Increase Your Vision
Cliff Bennett
CreateSpace
978-1-4536-4724-0
Three Stars (out of Five)

The first forty pages of Cliff Bennett's multifaceted book offer a poignant glimpse into the struggles of his dysfunctional family during the Great Depression. Fortunately, Bennett had enough positive experiences in school to offset the negative. His resolve to attend and stay in college is an inspiring testament to the power of character. Bennett's vivid memories of an unhappy childhood and a challenging adolescence serve as an ironic and fascinating introduction to the second section of the book: the guileless retelling of his fifty-plus years as a teacher and school administrator.

In the autobiographical areas of *Challenging Choices*, Bennett has composed a smart manifesto on life, love, and education, and his commentary on fifty years of educational philosophy and policy is riveting. Equally worth reading is the section on self improvement entitled "Holistic Prescriptions for Continuous Personal Growth," which includes a list of potentially paradigm-shifting exercises.

Unfortunately, extraneous material makes the book difficult to fully enjoy. Bennett includes dozens of common motivational quotes, some with a spiritual bent, throughout the fifteen chapters. They are nice enough to read but they tend to detract from the author's own thought-provoking prose. Bennett's poetry is another unnecessary addition. Though the content is touching, most of the poems are not particularly well written. And while the majority of personal anecdotes Bennett shares are entertaining and in keeping with the book's theme, some are dull and, at times, even off-putting. The fact that all are from the heart does redeem the stories that otherwise fall flat.

Parents, teachers, or school administrators will likely find *Challenging Choices* a pleasurable read, as Bennett's spot-on insights do provide many jewels of educational wisdom.

Patty Sutherland