

Confessions of a Clueless Rebel

Tom Corbett

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Confessions of a Clueless Rebel is a delightfully wry, self-deprecating memoir.

Tom Corbett's lighthearted memoir *Confessions of a Clueless Rebel* follows the respected social policy expert who rose far beyond his 1950s working-class, repressed Catholic upbringing to inhabit the highest echelons of academia and government policy.

The son of a factory worker and a disgruntled barmaid confined to an insular world, Corbett held few expectations of academic and career success, or even of life beyond the gritty streets of Worcester, Massachusetts.

His rough-and-tumble boyhood involved enduring the eternal bickering and binge drinking of his parents, bridging the gap between ethnic factions within his poor neighborhood, and navigating the conflicting priorities of the Catholic faith and romantic love and lust. He reconciles disparate conclusions about his academic abilities and reassesses his beliefs and prospects after an aborted stint at seminary school. Cast adrift from a preordained life, Corbett finds himself at a secular university filled with thought-provoking ideas that turn him into a political dissident, a Vietnam War protester, and a Peace Corps volunteer in India. Ultimately, he becomes a social welfare leader, often quoted in the media.

What makes this such a pleasant read is Corbett's refreshingly candid humor. He is genuinely funny. Jokes like "Best to torture people in small doses; after all, I am not a sadist" and "Alas, good judgment prevailed, and I shelved any aspirations for world dominion" punctuate his prose. The book's thoughtful perspective combines themes of humility and charm. Its tone exhibits genuine respect for fellow human beings and offers pearls of wisdom. An expressed desire to leave the world better off than he found it is inspiring.

The book is excessively long, however. The story rambles and revisits topics that were already covered. Nostalgic ricochets across time and midparagraph topic changes are disorienting. Corbett's younger years are related in far greater detail than are his adult accomplishments, which are mentioned in passing and with references to his other books.

There is very little dialogue or action to break up the book's otherwise endearing monologue. People and situations are discussed rather than brought to life, and reminisces that are not integral to the story impede the pace.

Wrong words and missing words are a repeated distraction, and a few political rants demonstrate Corbett's personal philosophy. They reflect a liberal worldview, and though they sometimes seem biased, they demonstrate Corbett's persuasiveness.

A full and amusing account of a life, *Confessions of a Clueless Rebel* is a delightfully wry, self-deprecating memoir.

WENDY HINMAN (October 12, 2018)

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