



Confessions of a Southern Baby-Boomer: How I Survived Crack Cocaine Addiction, the Mafia & Other Totally True Tales

Meg Henderson Wade

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Crack cocaine addiction seems worlds apart from the life of an upper middle-class Southern belle. At one time in her life, the author, Meg Henderson Wade, would have enthusiastically agreed; that is until the day her husband of seventeen years said, "Try this," and handed her a pipe.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, in the 1960s, Meg had a typical childhood. She discovered the theatre in her teens and began dating a member of a New York mafia family. She maintained a rather tame relationship with him until she moved to San Francisco in her early twenties. Her move came shortly after the assassination of Harvey Milk, and she offers some insights into the mood of the city at that time.

Wade has an infectious enthusiasm for celebrity, and she cleverly shares a few encounters with the famous. One short chapter recounts the story of a teenage boy she worked with who spent weekends with Michael Jackson before his proclivities were known. Newt Gingrich has a cameo, as does the Iran Contra affair.

The writing style is a tad sophomoric, with nearly every page boasting oversized quotes, advice, or idioms. The story moves back and forth in time at a dizzying pace and is often repetitive, especially in her use of Southern and baby-boomer clichés. These flaws tend to confuse and annoy, but to be fair, they are also somewhat endearing.

Nearing thirty, Meg marries Ned, a family friend and career Navy man. She chooses to ignore his history of drug use and selling, assuming the Navy has turned him around. The marriage progresses in a typical fashion, with Meg blaming herself for his lack of a sex drive and heavy alcohol use. They withdraw from one another, he's gone much of the time, and by the time she takes the proffered pipe, she's desperate to save the marriage.

Wade believes she was addicted to crack cocaine from the first puff. She gushes, "At first, doing the cocaine was so much fun!! I guess that's how it reels you in like a trout to a juicy worm."

Because she has no history of abuse in any form, her sudden descent into addiction catches her completely off guard. Her writing is at its best here; she describes with sincere passion her nine months of paranoia, hyperactivity, weight loss, and marriage under the influence.

Not so well done is her escape from the disease. Dangerously thin, with an infected eye, and mentally unbalanced, she returns to her parents' home, confesses everything, and with their help, seeks treatment. At this point, the book offers a few odd flashbacks and ends abruptly. She alludes to her husband's death, but never explains it. She barely says a word about treatment after finding out there was nowhere for "White, upper middle class crack whores" to go.

Nevertheless, Wade's reason for writing the book is repeated often and sincerely in its pages and she says it again in the final paragraph: "So that's my story and I'm sticking to it. I am going 'Out on a Limb' like Shirley Maclaine and confessing my tales of crack cocaine addiction in order to motivate other addicts who need help."

PATTY SUTHERLAND (July 15, 2010)

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