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From Three Feet Off the Ground: The Year My Children Taught Me How to See the World…and Myself

Christie Havey Smith
Emerald Shores Publishing (Jan 28, 2014)
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Amid the "fragmentation" and loss of selfhood she felt after having children, Christie Havey Smith experienced a spiritual reawakening. She details five practices she learned while observing her daughter and son, along with the discovery that embracing family does not always mean putting one's creativity "on hold." Part family memoir, part inspirational self-help book from a Christian perspective, *From Three Feet Off the Ground: The Year My Children Taught Me How to See the World* offers an uplifting reminder that faith can transform the tedium of caregiving during the toddler years. Motherhood as a daily ministry—without the tension of the "mommy wars" debates—becomes a restorative gift.

Chapters organized by seasons humorously capture the chaos of life with children. Through everyday moments and memories from her own past, including an encounter in a London art gallery, Smith highlights the gentle directives to "be amazed, be free, be attentive, be present, be love." She explores the wisdom in simplicity while acknowledging the difficulty of inhabiting these states of mind. The work contains echoes of counseling guides that relay the message to "let go and let God."

Rigorous readers of evangelical writing may note the tendency to quote other writers, such as the poet Rumi, and to refer to Buddhism, rather than to ground examples in specific scriptures. Recurring mentions of angels may also strike some as sentimental. Still, for those who appreciate a personable view on the topic of contentment, the author's wide-ranging approach adds literary interest as well as mainstream appeal. Smith's talent for crisp comparisons ("to discover the gift that was in hiding, the fleck of gold hidden in the rubble") and ear for music turn many passages into beautiful considerations of finding inner peace.

Prominent themes include the innocence of children, love as an essential task, and the household as a site for learning and growth. Smith's portrayal of her family is balanced; she illustrates challenging events with graceful admission of her own role in them, and describes the pleasures of residing in the present with equally well-written candor: "there was a time when I seemed to stumble wildly upon *strange fire*, how it seemed natural to come into contact with the divine spark in others and all around. It isn't until I'm laying Adeline and Keegan down in their beds, looking over one, and then the other, that I recognize these two little people are my new strange fire. … They are reminding me that there's beauty packed into the corners and there are people willing to help you find it."

Rewarding sections reveal the immediacy of children's responses to their surroundings, and the author's gradual integration of a similar open-armed acceptance of the mysterious unfolding of her own life. *From Three Feet Off the Ground* speaks to an audience of stay-at-home mothers in search of a lasting alternative to inner strife with the role, yet its encouraging tidings are relevant to all parents. This memoir is an appealing take on the call to meet each day on its own terms and with gratitude and wonderment.

KAREN RIGBY (February 4, 2014)

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