

Clarion Review ★★★★★

SELF-HELP

Housewives of America...The Real Story: Family, Faith, and Forgiveness

Stacie M. Coleman

Crossbooks Publishing

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Stacie M. Coleman's mother got Stacie high on marijuana as early as grammar school. Despite this, Stacie grew up to be a teenager who could still put others before herself, and who ultimately quit high school to keep her niece from going into foster care. These remarkable events are buried in *Housewives of America...The Real Story: Family, Faith, & Forgiveness*, a memoir masked as a self-help book.

In the introduction, Coleman tells us she wrote this book to convey the real life of an American housewife, truths that are often overshadowed by the façade of the *Real Housewives* show aired on the Bravo TV network. It is a valiant goal. As Coleman writes in the second chapter, "From what it costs the women on *The Real Housewives of New York* for a new purse, I can clothe my entire family, including the dog, and purchase a new car!"

This book could have been a fun, pop-culture reality check. Instead, Coleman muddles her central message with myriad goals. She hopes to make women's lives easier, to elicit laughter, and to inspire women to follow their dreams—pretty ambitious for a text of ninety-two pages.

Housewives of America starts out with self-help advice that is sprinkled with Coleman's personal stories. Among her suggestions for helplessly flailing housewives are creating a "honey-do" list, venting your husband-related frustrations to your friends, taking care of your own physical and mental health, and planning a regular date night with your spouse.

However, about a third of the way into the book the tone shifts and the text turns around, becoming a memoir dotted with self-help advice (contrary to how the book began.) Coleman's young life—surviving a drug-addled single mom, bouncing from house to house, quitting high school—is worthy of a memoir. Her adult life contains additional significant events, including miscarriage, surgery, and divorce. Her personal narrative could easily serve as an illuminating contrast to the fake, spoiled housewives portrayed on television. But constructed around self-help suggestions that are all too general, the intended foil loses much of its punch.

In another vein, some of the photos included at the ends of chapters were not relevant to the text and should have ended up on the cutting floor. Finally, it was a bit disconcerting that the author advertised her vacation rental business right in the middle of a chapter on "Money Matters."

Despite Coleman's admirable goals—and the instinct to use her own serious and compelling life story in contrast to the foolish premise of a popular TV show—readers probably won't find definitive solutions in *Housewives of America...The Real Story*.

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (February 16, 2012)

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