

## If You Did What I Asked in the First Place

**Lori B. Duff**

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*If You Did What I Asked in the First Place* collects humorous, bite-sized personal essays about marriage, motherhood, and occasional medical emergencies.

Lori B. Duff's book *If You Did What I Asked in the First Place* is full of pithy, comedic takes on life's ups and downs.

A husband, two kids, and a lucrative career result in a whole bunch of stories. From Duff's one and only ride on a motorcycle to the psychological benefits of Candy Crush, no topic is too strange or too obscure for this collection to point out, analyze, or make fun of. Whatever life throws her way, Duff faces with determination and a witty retort.

Written in a clear, sharp voice, these autobiographical snippets focus on the everyday, as well as on personal faults and foibles. Duff both pokes fun at herself and embraces the quirks and experiences that make her unique. Entries present her family as an average bunch who annoy each other now and then, but also as wonderful, special individuals who invite affection and admiration. Bold and unapologetic opinions are forwarded on a range of relatable topics.

Each anecdote is a few pages long at most. Some are little more than creative venting; others comment on larger issues or potentially unfamiliar topics like the sleep apnea diagnosis process. They take the responsibilities of motherhood and professionalism seriously, but aren't close to as serious when it comes to self-reflection. They welcome laughing along as they rail against school bus routes and inadequate pocket space, and personal photographs illustrate select entertaining episodes.

The essays are sorted into six themed sections, including "Out of My Element," which covers topics like the pros and cons of introversion and the anxiety of trying to measure up to peers. Their humor is personable, self-deprecating, and sometimes silly. Some jokes are forced and off-color, though, and all-caps used for emphasis come across as peevish. The final section is a positive and loving anchor that diverges from the established formula, delivering heartwarming gut punches that underscore how much Duff values her family, despite—or even because of—the things she ribs them about.

Amusing rather than laugh-out-loud funny, the book's entries are the embodiment of self-described "mind candy"—light and fun, useful for unwinding after a busy day. They cover issues and pet peeves that are minor in the grand scheme. Their language is casual and chatty, even inventive, as they cover stubborn children, embarrassing accidents, and fond memories in the making.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (August 20, 2019)

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