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Life and Times: A Memoir

Dorothy Miller Whitner
Trafford Publishing (February 2008)
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“To be constructive and happy I think we must accent the positive and eliminate the negative” the author once wrote in a letter to her son. “Dwelling on the negative can tear out your guts.”

The fifth of seven children Dorothy Miller Whitner was born to a farming family in 1919. *Life and Times* tells the story of how she took advantage of opportunities in her life and became a millionaire. It is also a cautionary tale of the hazards that come with wealth. Failed business deals and troubled children play a major role in her memoir.

With a sharp memory and (often too) close attention to detail Dorothy relates stories from life on the farm and tales of her childhood friends and neighbors. She attends college for two years but her education is put on hold when she’s offered a job as a bookkeeper. Dorothy soon moves into government work moving her way up until she meets her first husband Gatewood. In the early years of their marriage Dorothy cannot understand that her husband’s unhappiness is due to chronic depression. She only knows that she is unable to make him happy.

After their first child is born the couple purchases the Baltimore franchise of Mail-me-Monday an bookkeeping service for small businesses. The two build a successful enterprise and have four more children before Gatewood’s mistress demands he get a divorce.

Instead of letting life get her down Dorothy travels to Reno gets a job as a shill and makes enough money for a quickie Nevada divorce. The couple then sell the Mail-me-Money franchise but remain friends and business partners investing in a few more business ventures that end up making Dorothy a very wealthy woman.

The first portion of the book although lengthy and with more detail than would interest a general reader is interesting and even inspirational. The look at pre-depression farm life is enlightening as is the story of a young working woman with a positive attitude.

The book’s second half though is taken up with letters from her children complicated business dealings involving her second husband and a marina and a long description of difficulties with investments and insurance which cost the author a great deal of money.

Unfortunately a few of her children inherited Gatewood’s depression. Their only son Mervin who had always lacked focus and stability committed suicide at the age of forty-three. And her twin daughters both suffered from alcoholism.

The book is riddled with typos and drastic cuts must be made to improve the narrative’s flow. *Life and Times* is most appropriate for the author’s friends and relatives who desire a closer look at her rags-to-riches story.
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