

My Family Compass: A Journey through Family Secrets and Dysfunction

Ann Stone

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Ann Stone courageously exposes the tragic, depressing, and often infuriating story of her broken family in *My Family Compass*. Despite the difficult circumstances she describes, she tries to convey a message of hope to others who are experiencing serious dysfunction within their own families.

Due to the hurtful actions and mean-spirited attitudes of certain family members, readers who cannot relate to the author's personal situation may set the book aside. Stone's intended audience, however, will relate to her story. She offers it to show that no one is alone in dealing with dysfunction and that overcoming its negative effects is indeed possible.

Stone believes that every family has its own "compass" dictating a pattern of behavior that family members follow, teach to successive generations, and seem destined to repeat. When that compass is leading a family in the wrong direction, someone must break the cycle, or the dysfunction will continue. If the "course keeps leading you to repeated patterns of abuse, neglect, anger or lack of love and harmony," writes Stone, "why not change compass lanes and follow your heart and bliss?"

For many years, Stone believed that she was at fault for the misery that surrounded her. It is only after the deaths of her parents and being well into her own adulthood that she was able to put her own role into perspective and conquer her feelings of guilt. She overcame the horrors of her past, including emotional and physical abuse within her family, and changed direction toward a happier, more fulfilling present and future.

Stone incorporates a wide variety of poems, song lyrics, and quotes into her story. The juxtaposition of words from Aristotle, Carl Jung, and Desmond Tutu with lyrics from Christina Aguilera, Michael Jackson, and June Carter Cash is odd, but it is also endearing and very personal. Chosen to reinforce her message or to reflect a particular mood, the quoted passages range from pithy to sweet and from profound to trite.

My Family Compass is marred by incorrect punctuation, grammatical errors, and awkward sentence structure. Misstated popular sayings—"it takes two to tangle," "far and few between," and "the dye was cast," among others—are troubling, too.

Writing this book was clearly a cathartic experience for the author. Her desire to help others who have experienced circumstances similar to her own is evident, but Stone's message is too often lost in unwieldy wording.

CHERYL HIBBARD (March 22, 2013)

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