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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

Parenting Pearls: Gems for the Puzzled Parent

Verlene McGee
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In the1920s, child-care experts urged parents to follow a prescribed approach for raising children, arguing that maternal instinct and tradition could no longer be trusted to produce a normal child. They advocated for adherence to scientific techniques that included imposing strict feeding schedules and curtailing the natural parental desire to love and indulge children. Parents were warned that a spoiled child might grow up to exhibit negative behavior.

Luckily, attitudes about child rearing in the United States changed considerably during the twentieth century and such harsh methods no longer prevail. In *Parenting Pearls: Gems for the Puzzled Parent,* Verlene McGee offers practical suggestions for parents, grandparents, and other caregivers. The author draws on her own experience as a mother, grandmother, teacher, and leader of parenting workshops to formulate her ideas, the “pearls” of the book’s title. Topics include establishing a consistent bedtime, setting limits for television time, and responding to a daughter who worries about being overweight. The author’s pithy comments summarize each chapter’s message.

Written with ironic good humor, the author’s commonsense advice shows insight into some of the typical problems parents face as they guide children through their formative years. For example, while manners are no substitute for honesty, integrity, and the ability to complete tasks satisfactorily, they do help a child build the necessary self-confidence and respect to carry into adulthood. “Good manners will take your children where beauty, intelligence, skilled communication, and brand-name clothing will not,” McGee writes.

The author reminds parents not to devote all their attention and love to their children but to save some of those precious gifts for themselves. Adults who feel satisfied with their own lives will have the necessary reserves of energy and sensitivity to nurture young people. She explains, “It is important that we attend also to our needs as parents so that we can attend to their needs as children.”

McGee makes creative use of alliteration and turns of phrase that hold reader interest, but sometimes she sacrifices clarity for cleverness. The narrative flow lacks a sense of cohesive direction and chapter titles don’t always convey chapter content. In addition, the book has a problem with incorrectly placed punctuation marks and word repetition.

Despite these editorial shortcomings, *Parenting Pearls* contains sound ideas about child care that will serve to clarify typical but sometimes puzzling youthful behavior.

MARGARET CULLISON (February 16, 2012)

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