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Single State of the Union: Single Women Speak Out on Life, Love, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Diane Mapes, editor
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This series of essays goes further than the usual sex, dating, and "you and your cat" writing that readers might expect from a book about being single women. Mapes arranges the short essays, by thirty different authors, in seven topic areas that illustrate her own appreciation of humorous writing about women including: "How Come a Nice Girl Like You Isn't Married," "I Married Adventure," and "Live Alone and Like It."

Mapes has humor writing credentials of her own and is the author of *How to Date in a Post-Dating Word* which is her take on standard dating how-to books. She's written satirical essays and reported on dating, singles, travel, and swingers for publications including the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*.

Much of the work included in "Single Women Speak Out" is written by women who are writers by profession and it shows. The unifying features include a frequent nod to the satisfactions that can be found in being single—but not in a tuned-out or man-hating fashion. In addition to the good humor displayed, the essays are deftly written, often include fast-paced witty dialogue, and tell concisely constructed stories. Jane Hodges' piece "The Richmond Question" describes a generation of women who saw higher education in one particular light: "It wasn't that a smarter woman would make a better world, but a better wife…" And comedian Chelsea Handler in *Thunder* holds nothing back in her wedding rant: "When I get married, I'm going to register at Bank of America."

The writing is accessible to readers married or single, who will be able to appreciate both the self-deprecating humor in the essays, and the cultural observations the writers make about marriage over the past few generations. Readers who expect to laugh out loud at each turn may be disappointed with some of the pieces; while all stories retain some measure of humor, a handful are more poignant in nature than funny.

Single State of the Union makes its best impression when it takes on the customary or tedious notions our society projects onto unmarried women, turns them back on themselves, and

does so in a way that makes the reader laugh out loud. The writers know how to make their stories resonate with readers' own experiences and, taken as a whole, have a happy commonality in their expressions of a thoroughly modern take on singlehood.

Chris Arvidson