

Soul of a Professor: Memoir of an Un-Engineered Life

Lisa A. Pruitt

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Soul of a Professor is an inspiring memoir about a lengthy search for a higher calling.

Lisa A. Pruitt's calibrated memoir *Soul of a Professor* concerns how work once undermined her sense of self-worth.

Pruitt grew up in New England with an MIT-educated engineer father whom she admired and adored. When her sister died at the age of two, Pruitt began to wonder if the wrong daughter had survived. Her feelings of unworthiness led to an eating disorder and alcohol abuse, though she remained determined to win her father's approval and pride via academic successes. Her efforts paid off with early admittance to college, a scholarship, and research opportunities.

Pruitt, who was married before graduate school, faced thirteen years of marital struggles, during which her ambitions were in constant friction with her husband's desire for simplicity and stability. Horses were their point of commonality, and she dreamed of settling into a lifestyle that suited them both—after achieving tenure. After her divorce, Pruitt took an academic leave to get help for her addictions. She records some deleterious encounters with health officials and calls traditional methods of treating addiction into question. Later, she worked her love for horses into her engineering work, hosting workshops for students and faculty. She redirected her coping mechanisms toward loving care for her horses and family, musing on souls, the afterlife, and animal communication.

The prose is careful and immediate, working to convey Pruitt's work toward healing with conviction. Split into five parts, the book traces her progressive transformation. References to Pruitt's age, the duration of her marriage, and her engineering life mark the passage of time with grace. The early chapters, which cover her frantic bulimic and anxious episodes, are short but coherent in revealing childhood pains. Later, the passages lengthen to encapsulate a wider range of experiences. Their pacing matches Pruitt's growing maturity, becoming less frantic and more meditative. And Pruitt's recovery is captured in open, patient terms, with longer, more detailed anecdotes that include scenery and rich emotional descriptions. These later passages sit with Pruitt's emotions rather than running from them. Throughout, succinct conversations are used to break up Pruitt's ruminating inner monologues. And the book balances its rough moments with its peaceful ones well, so that no one period dominates its work, which is expansive in its scope and appeal.

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MARI CARLSON (August 5, 2022)

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