

The Cracker Factory 2: Welcome to Women's Group

Joyce Rebeta-Burditt

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"In the last forty-plus years there isn't one second I've lived, from absolute joy to utter heartbreak, that would have been made better by drinking," says Rebeta-Burditt. "Not one."

As a tired young wife and mother of three in the late 1960's, Rebeta-Burditt spent three months in a hospital psych ward being treated for alcoholism. She documented this time in her life in the best-selling 1977 autobiographical novel, *The Cracker Factory*. This sequel, *The Cracker Factory 2*, reintroduces readers to the main character, Cassie Barrett, in the present day. She is now a regular at the Tuesday night Women's Alcoholics Anonymous Group with forty-one years of sobriety under her belt. In chapters written in screenplay script format, readers meet the other women in Cassie's group, ranging from the angry teenage foster child, Terri, to the sassy and sarcastic seventy-two-year-old Katherine. Together the women support each other through life's ups and downs, including serious health issues and a husband gone missing, with the ongoing goal of maintaining sobriety.

Unlike the original *Cracker Factory*, which was written as a traditional novel, this book presents not only the fictional Cassie's story, but includes alternating chapters chronicling the author's true-life journey to AA and life as a sober television executive and writer in the drug- and booze-fueled Hollywood of the 1970s and '80s. She writes of being left out of after-hours networking events because she didn't drink and being the only tired person present at late-into-the-evening meetings because she hadn't snorted cocaine with the rest of the office.

Though the script format of Cassie's chapters can feel awkward at first, it is worth the effort to continue reading. Rebeta-Burditt writes with a witty voice of reason, especially when faced with extraordinary situations like the missing husband or the office full of cokeheads, and she doesn't sugarcoat her feelings about the need for alcoholics to seek help. Readers who have connections to AA or Al-Anon will find validation and support in these pages, and those who are curious about the sometimes mysterious program will catch a glimpse into how it all works. One of the key aspects of AA that makes it so successful is that the alcoholic seeking recovery becomes part of a group. As Cassie explains it, "Without the experience, strength, and hope we can give each other, each of us is an island floating off to nowhere."

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (November 19, 2010)

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