ForeWord Reviews

SELF-HELP

This Is Not the Life I Ordered
Deborah Collins Stephens
Deborah Collins Stephens Jackie Speier Michealene Cristini Risley Jan Yanehiro
Jackie Speier
Jan Yanehiro
Michealene Christini Risley
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"Many think of the word courage only as defined in the dictionary," writes Deborah Collins Stephens, "….and see it solely as a solitary journey. We believe the journey of courage is best walked with women friends who, literally and figuratively, 'en-courage' us."

Stephens and the three other co-authors of this book, once jokingly referred to as "the female versions of the book of Job," do not claim to be either self-help gurus or psychologists. By their own admission, they are women who met monthly around a kitchen table and shared everything from the mundane to the mistakes. Their common ground being the "tidal waves" they have surfed and survived as women, the authors have dubbed themselves Women in Transition or WIT for short. After meeting many other women in similar straits at their Survive and Thrive talks, they became aware of a need for a "WIT Kit."

Beginning by sharing the stories of their own lives "not ordered," they move on to stories of "challenge, resilience and triumph" gathered from interviewing others. Having learned that mistakes can be "doorways to discovery," they also offer stories of common mistakes that women make and tips on transforming them into "stepping stones to answers." Amidst the more familiar solace and esteem boosters (i.e. "quit believing you must be more like a man") there are more proactive tips like those found in "Loss of Words Makes Us Feel Lost." Instead of being caught tongue-tied by embarrassing questions while in transition, the authors advise, "craft answers and rehearse them in front of the mirror." In the chapter "Reinventing Yourself" readers are asked to keep a "gratitude journal" even if, like Deborah found, there are "days when you can only be grateful the dog did not pee on the rug."

This book is more about "turning 'woe is me' into action" than coddling; more about "creating instead of complaining." Stating boldly, "Ladies, it's time for us to grow up," the book

is particularly persuasive concerning women taking responsibility for their own financial health. To that end, the chapter entitled “Understanding Money and a Women’s Worth” gives straightforward directives about how to create a net worth statement, understanding your tax returns, and creating a vision for your financial future. “We’ve all heard the adage ‘knowledge is power,’” say the authors, “We believe that acting on knowledge is what produces power.”

While steely resolve is a virtue touted, the motivational book also recognizes that “when dreams crumble, hope is the first thing lost,” and the WIT kit suggests tools and exercises for finding help, as well as learning how to accept it.

Building a group of supportive women friends while following these tips of WIT should leave readers not just “keeping their heads above water” but practicing a strong-armed stroke heading toward less turbulent waters.