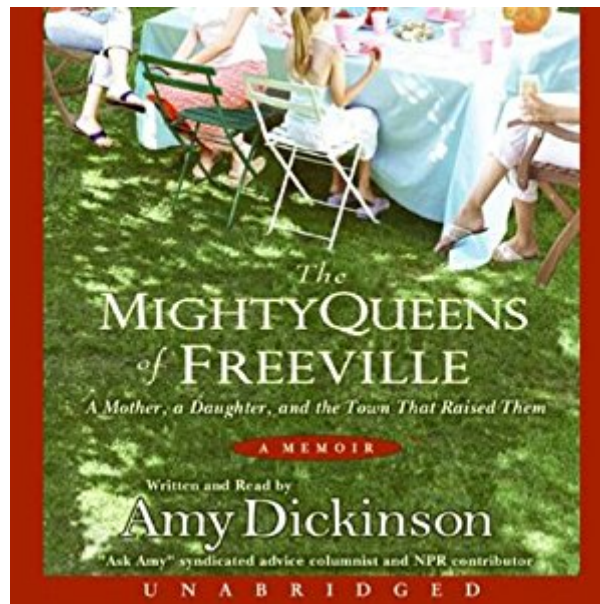


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The Mighty Queens Of Freeville: A Mother, A Daughter, And The Town That Raised Them



Synopsis

Millions of Americans know and love Amy Dickinson from reading her syndicated advice column "Ask Amy" and from hearing her wit and wisdom weekly on National Public Radio. Amy's audience loves her for her honesty, her small-town values, and the fact that her motto is "I make the mistakes so you don't have to." In *The Mighty Queens of Freeville*, Amy Dickinson shares those mistakes and her remarkable story. This is the tale of Amy and her daughter and the people who helped raise them after Amy found herself a reluctant single parent. Though divorce runs through her family like an aggressive chromosome, the women in her life taught her what family is about. They helped her to pick up the pieces when her life fell apart and to reassemble them into something new. It is a story of frequent failures and surprising successes, as Amy starts and loses careers, bumbles through blind dates and adult education classes, travels across the country with her daughter and their giant tabby cat, and tries to come to terms with the family's aptitude for "dorkitude." They have lived in London, D.C., and Chicago, but all roads lead them back to Amy's hometown of Freeville (pop. 458), a tiny village where Amy's family has tilled and cultivated the land, tended chickens and Holsteins, and built houses and backyard sheds for more than 200 years. Most important, though, her family members all still live within a ten-house radius of each other. With kindness and razor-sharp wit, they welcome Amy and her daughter back weekend after weekend, summer after summer, offering a moving testament to the many women who have led small lives of great consequence in a tiny place. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 7 hours and 26 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Hyperion AudioBooks

Audible.com Release Date: February 3, 2009

Language: English

ASIN: B0027IQ5MU

Best Sellers Rank: #213 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Parenting > Single Parents
#951 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Parenting > Parenting Girls #2128 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists

Customer Reviews

This memoir was wonderful - once I started reading I couldn't put it down. Dickinson's candid, no-nonsense prose is at once honest, touching and punctuated with hilarity, and her stories of female resilience are achingly real. The story follows Dickinson from her divorce (when her daughter Emily is a toddler) to Emily's freshman year of college and catalogues the wide and varied lessons they learned together along the way. It's not a memoir about her rise to fame but rather about the extraordinarily ordinary women in her family who gave her skills to become a successful advice columnist and at the same time raise a child. I highly recommend this book - read it, then give a copy to your mom!

These are the loose memoirs of Amy Dickinson, the woman chosen to replace advice columnist extraordinaire Ann Landers. Her childhood, failed marriage, single motherhood and wayward pets are all fair game for this humorous look-back at her life before and after Ask Amy. Billed as a memoir, Dickinson's book is perhaps better described as a loose collection of cute anecdotes about her family, her divorce, her pets, or anything else that comes to mind. Pieced together a bit haphazardly, Dickinson nonetheless has a sharp, witty voice that shines through no matter the seriousness of the subject matter. The ex-husband gets repeatedly skewered throughout the book (apparently time, in fact, does not heal all wounds), but that's the price one pays when an ex-spouse has a national platform on which to skew as she wishes. While the anecdotes were very enjoyable, there is a lack of focus on the original focus of the book, namely the female family members who inspire the title. The snippets of aunts, sisters and especially her mother leave you feeling it just wasn't enough. What the reader does get, however, is a snapshot of life that is easy to relate to and produces a chuckle or two. If you love humor applied to the human condition, we're willing to bet you'd enjoy this one, as long as you don't have expectations of a thorough and introspective autobiography. Uplifting and never trite, Amy Dickinson touches on struggles common to all of us, meets those troubles head-on and shows us why we should never, ever give up.

I believe that behind every ordinary face there's an extraordinary life story. But my belief wavered while reading *The Mighty Queens of Freeville: A Mother, a Daughter, and the People Who Raised Them*, a memoir by Amy Dickinson (of the syndicated advice column, "Ask Amy"). The life that Amy presents seems quite ordinary (motherhood, divorce, an extended family), but the narrative voice does little to make the familiar circumstances feel universal or engaging. Chapters are organized by topic (e.g. divorce; motherhood; buying a house; pets; moving away from family; career) rather than by time, and most begin by bumping the reader back to when Amy was married, with a baby. Over

time, the structure feels like a loop that prevents forward movement. A truly distinctive aspect of Amy's life -- that her extended family is almost exclusively women -- resides mostly in the memoir's title and is not developed within. Nor are many words devoted to the truly extraordinary aspect -- Amy being named successor to Ann Landers. Readers who bear through the ordinary in this memoir will likely be disappointed by the exclusion of the other.

I've bought copies to give to friends and family as gifts. Her work is a cross between Erma Bombeck and Ann Landers. She is as nice in person (I was lucky enough to be befriended by her when we moved to Dryden when I was in 6th and part of my 7th grades and have re-connected with her when her column started being carried by my local newspaper).

It was interesting to read a book about a single mother who had so much moral support from her community. When my father died when I was a small child, my mother did not have many people to turn to for that kind of help. I was the youngest of nine and fortunately my older brothers and sisters formed a close circle. So I was fascinated to see how "the mighty queens" really helped one another. At times, however, I felt like the togetherness would have been a bit too much for me! Were they shutting other people out? Amy Dickinson takes strands of her life and treats each of them separately both in theme and chronology. The reader has to really stand back and weave all of the strands together to see what was actually happening in its full context at any point in her life. That is certainly one way to approach memoir writing but not the only way. As for her marriage, I would say they both contributed to its failure. Their decision to have London as a base for their early home life seemed to have cut her off from any kind of even minimal career fulfillment. It is no wonder that she was overwhelmed with loneliness. But she also seemed rather passive in the situation. I don't know how old she was when she married her husband, but she seemed like someone who needed more time to achieve independence before she married. I like her a lot as a result of reading the book and think she is lucky to be so mobile while still having a very full career.

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