

Anna Stewart
anna@motherhands.com
www.motherhands.com

Book Review Parenting

The Imperfect Mom:
Candid Confessions of Mothers Living in the Real World
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We've heard plenty about the drive for women to become supermoms or perfect mothers. When we do hear about a mom who did not live up to that ideal, say by drowning her kids in the bathtub, we know just what that is- a very bad mother. But what's inbetween this ideal of perfection and the tragedy of failure are, maybe 90% of mothers.

In this highly engaging anthology, we hear the confessions of women being what Kathryn Black, author of *Mothering Without a Map* and the forward of this book, calls being a perfect enough mother. Some of the confessions seem a bit trite such as when a daughter trips while eating a pretzel and pokes her mouth. But the power in such a story is that every mother, both dead and alive, has felt the mother guilt when a child under her supervision got hurt. Reading these makes moms feel not crazy and gratefully in the company of other imperfect real moms.

Some stories grapple with bigger issues such as miscarriage, circumcision, and being an unwed Muslim mother. These are stories we don't usually share at those park bench chats but imagine how much better we would feel if we did.

Then there are the ones about working moms who have business trips on their child's birthday, or the guilt of not enrolling a child in summer camps at all, or when we say no to pets or purchases or when we say yes.

Though these are professional women writers who wrote these stories, which is why they are so good, it could be anyone that lived them. They glow with the mindfulness we all wish to emulate. Polished and whole, you may find yourself sharing them and trying to remember which friends told you the story.

My favorite is Jacquelyn Mitchard's, "I was a Car-Pool Dropout." She is the author of several bestselling novels including *The Deep End of the Ocean*. I haven't read her novels yet, but her story is one I'll be sharing on the park bench. After the death of her husband, and adopting a daughter to join her two sons, she skillfully tells us how she realized she wasn't, and her life wasn't, what it used to be. She was a single mother. She was late a lot. She was chronically unorganized. And she was not a bad mother, even though she was kicked out of the car pool. She talks about the shame and the isolation and the part that bothered her the most, no one cut her any slack. There's still no room in our society for any mother, single, poor, grieving or busy, to not fulfill their roles. Jacquelyn didn't ask for help and no one offered.

Perhaps that's the message in many of these stories. When Teme Weinstein Ring talks about being too sick to stand up for years, she is also struggling with learning to ask for help (she doesn't get too good at it but her boys learn to take care of themselves). Imagine if we asked for help or offered it, next time we're on the park bench. It would help knock down the ideal of perfection and realize that good enough mothers are all we need to be.

Bio

Anna Stewart, mother, mentor and author, has published over 300 articles. She is the author of *Mother Blessings: Honoring Women Becoming Mothers*, an artful guide for creating ceremonies for pregnant women or families adopting. Order it at www.wovenword.com or www.amazon.com. She also serves as an instructor for coaching pregnant women through the Academy for Coaching Parents (www.acpi.biz). Go to her website, www.motherhands.com for more information on Anna's workshops.