

BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING WITH A SMILE

A Triumph Over Sexism In Good Humor

LEST WE FORGET: A Salute To The Women Who Entered Corporate America Without A Road Map, By Louise E. Rothery. Seawordy Press, Marblehead, MA. Paper, 52 pp. \$10.00, To order, click [here](#) .

When my daughter was born, I had the feeling that she might be in the first generation that saw equality for women. As she grew older, and her intelligence manifested itself, I thought that I was only half right. The half that was wrong was that although her generation earned the right to equality, it might take the next generation of men to catch up to something I had written years before. What I had said was that the shortage of really bright people in the world made it necessary to ignore the race or color or gender of really bright people – the ones that would save the world and make it a better place. Despite the extraordinary accomplishments – and they are many and profound – of both my daughter and my daughters-in-law, we're not quite there yet. The same goes, by the way, for race, despite the election of a black president, who happens to be one of the brightest people this country has produced.

Cherish, then, this delightful little book by Louise E. Rothery -- one of the brightest people around.

She has taken the most serious manifestations of insensitivity about competent (or even incompetent) women by a cloddish society, and made the point even more cogent with her clever cartoons and accurate and pointed captions. Sexism, like racism, is such an anachronism that it may best be put in focus with humor. An editor of great consequence, a solid thinker and consultant, and a women who, it seems, has lived at least most of these foolish manifestations of the mindlessness of people who should be expected to know better, she knows whereof she lampoons.

I had the privilege, during the Carter administration, to write and edit a study for the President on the problems of the female business entrepreneurs. The task force that supplied the evidence for the study was comprised of undersecretaries and the like – most of whom were women. The only man on the task force was the only idiot on the team of financially and politically sophisticated women. His proposal was “Why not pass a law mandating that banks couldn't deny loans to any woman?” -- to which one of the women replied, “Not my bank, I hope.”

At random from a perfect booklet...

“You're a college graduate, and ready to take on the world. At interviews, despite your degree, you are asked what your typing speed is.”

”You get a raise ... and find out that a less qualified man got a bigger one. Your told ‘you earn enough for a woman’ .”

“When you shop for a car, despite a solid bank balance, excellent credit and job security, the dealer asks when your husband will be in to co-sign for you.” (This one particularly got to me. One of my good friends, a nationally renowned food editor, had her own business designing products for major national and international food product manufacturers. When she applied for a loan to buy a building to house her thriving business, her husband, a school teacher who made considerably less than she did, had to co-sign the loan for her.)

“You and an equal-level male colleague attend a meeting. He is asked for a budget estimate. You are asked to make coffee.”

Then there are the triumphs...

“You apply for a mortgage and get it – on your signature alone.”

“Your husband becomes acquainted with the vacuum cleaner, washer and dryer, and learns how to make meatloaf.”

In some 50 pages, loaded with painfully accurate cartoons attacking the gender gap and the glass ceiling, Rothery tells the story of pain, irrationality, and ultimately, progress from one generation to the next. It’s funny and it’s accurate. It’s lovely.

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