



Overcoming Adversity in Academia Stories from Generation X Faculty

Watson, Elwood, ed.

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Book Review

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This collection of essays by seventeen Generation X faculty members serving in various types of institutions and representing a range of disciplines, ranks, and roles aims to “demonstrate the personal issues, conflicts, and triumphs that are definitive of this generation” as they pertain to their academic careers. While some contributions are stronger than others, as a whole the book achieves its purpose through the insightful and honest author self-reflections.

The first sentences of the opening chapter offer, “The truth is unbelievable, not because it is untrue, but because no one wants to believe it. I am living proof.” The readers’ fear the whole book may sound like the all-too-familiar voice of a Gen Xer is quickly affirmed. The self-analysis of the first story flows into the next three installments and the reader may begin to wonder if the whole book is going to simply be a series of texts from a group of faculty who managed to gain a formal education but think life as a teacher ought to be different somehow.

However, Andria J. Woodell’s recollection from a female white southern social psychologist’s perspective changes the tone of the book and is followed by primarily thoughtful reflections and analysis of personal choices and responsibility, within the realities of various institutional contexts. Most authors adeptly identify key factors in their personal journey, including educational background and aspirations, family dynamics, sexual orientation, or race, which impacted their experiences in academia. Following these observations they share information about specific institutional obstacles and supports they encountered along their respective journeys and how each responded to the interplay of these factors.

David Prescott-Steed's chapter, explaining how his PhD research project on "the abyss" metaphor became an intentional factor in his post-doctoral decisions personally and professionally, was entertaining, well-written, and an appropriate summary of a Gen Xer's values encountering the challenges and triumphs of everyday life. Likewise, Kathleen and George Mollock's perceptive essay on an academic couples' journey in the higher education milieu, first as students and then as faculty, describes the choices they made and consequences of those choices, some anticipated, others unexpected.

For most Gen X academics, this would be a beneficial read, even if they cannot identify with every individual story or institutional context. Likewise, for the late baby-boomer or early-Gen X administrator, it may provide helpful examples of understanding how the realities of academia are seen from different points of view. For either a faculty member or administrator in a faith-related institution, the narratives of individuals in these contexts also describe the unique challenges and approaches to these extra dimensions of academic life. As a whole, the book presents an appropriate and necessary diversity of experiences (race, gender, sexual orientation, discipline). While some chapters were stronger than others, it was a worthwhile book to read and would be a valuable addition to a post-secondary library.

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