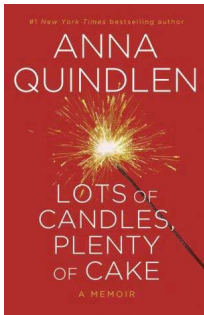


Anna Quindlen on what matters

Written by BY TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
Monday, 09 July 2012 11:42



Anna Quindlen, 60, has spent her career chronicling what it's like to be a woman. For her sisters of a certain age, the Pulitzer-prize winning author holds a mirror up to our lives in her new book, "Lots of Candles, Plenty of Cake."

Quindlen uses the introduction, "Life in the Fifties," to set the stage for a look back at the "arc" of her life. She lost her mother when she was only 19. She married early, but waited until her 30s to have children. She has had a long career in journalism and now looks forward to life after work and young children.

"First I was who I was. Then I didn't know what I was. Then I invented someone and became her. Then I began to like what I'd invented. And finally I was what I was again," she begins.

Quindlen spent years at the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* writing columns about her life. When she started her column, as a young wife and mother of two boys [her daughter came later], at first she wondered if her stories "would have any resonance outside the walls of our home."

She needn't have worried. She struck a chord with young mothers on the planet.

"I feel like I'm not alone,' some of those who wrote me said, and that sentiment changed my life," she wrote.

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As Quindlen shared her life, she learned what matters – and what doesn't.

Marriage matters.

"It's certain that no one actually knows what goes on in a marriage except the two people involved, and often not even them. ... I fell for Gerry Krovatin when I was young and foolish because he looked great in a sports jacket, because he was a terrific dancer, because he was cool and smart and knew things I didn't, which I scarcely thought possible. ... He has my back. He may not remember our social schedule or the names of some of our kids' friends, but he never forgets who wrote the bad review of my last book. I like that in a man."

Girlfriends matter.

"If you push a woman on how she really makes it through her day, or more important, her months and years, how she stays steady when things get rocky, who she calls when the doctor says, 'I'd like to run a few more tests,' she will mention her girlfriends."

Girlfriends, Quindlen says, are what we have "in addition to, or in lieu of, therapists. And when we reach a certain age, they may be who is left."

Solitude matters.

"Most of the world finds solitude strange. ... Maybe I'm hardwired to want to spend time alone. ... I prize my downtime, count on it as a writer, a parent, a person. ... When I was young, I was loath to admit that I liked being alone. ... Solitude is an acceptable form of selfishness."

Being a good parent matters.

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“I knew, without really thinking, that if I had kids, I was going ... to try to be as much like my own mother as possible.”

At one point, Quindlen realizes her children will ultimately leave her.

“We are good parents not so they will be loving enough to stay with us but so they will be strong enough to leave us. ... And in our sinking hearts, we begin to realize that while they know about safe sex, they are only beginning to understand that there is no such thing as safe love.”

Aging gracefully matters.

It has taken a while, but Quindlen has learned to accept the aging process.

“Many, if not most, women embrace their later years. ... Sixty is the new 40, as I’m sure you’ve heard.”

Stuff does not matter.

“I feel as though I am at the peak of a progression, and from here I would follow another gentle downward slope: smaller, tighter, cleaner, simpler. No clutter. Less Stuff. I’m not sure why this is the case. Maybe it’s because now I feel I know the truth about possessions, that they mean or prove or solve nothing. Stuff is not salvation.”

Quindlen is content with her lot in life.

“There was a time when I behaved as though I was the center of the universe. It was a good

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time, when I was young, and arrogant, and foolish, and eager, and terribly insecure and horribly insensible to others and not beholden to anyone else, without responsibility for houses or children or dogs or the cleanup after a disaster. I just like this time better.”

Quindlen seems to be the voice for women of her generation. She’s able to tell our stories with humor, grace, intelligence and a keen sense of humor.