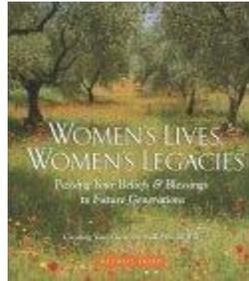


Book Reviews

Women's Lives, Women's Legacies by Rachael Freed



reviewed by Judith Helburn

Freed, Rachael. *Women's Lives, Women's Legacies: Passing Your Beliefs and Blessings to Future Generations*. Fairview Press, Riverside Ave., Minneapolis, 55454, 2003. ISBN 157749119X. Reviewed by Judith Helburn.

Rachael Freed's *Women's Lives* is a well written compliment to Susan Wittig Albert's *Writing from Life*. Both take a woman from writing about her past through her present and towards the future. Both use quotations, short vignettes from others, numerous hints and writing exercises. Both display a depth of insight and knowledge of memoir and legacy writings. And both emphasize the importance of sharing ones writing with other women in circles.

While *Writing from Life* focuses on the telling of our stories which will otherwise be lost, *Women's Lives* focuses on legacy and a spiritual ethical will. It is clear to me that Freed is familiar with Spiritual Eldering®, the work of Zalman Schachter-Shalomi as she not only quotes from the book but follows many of his teachings such as forgiving, facing one's mortality and, especially, the spiritual-ethical will. (*From Age-ing to Sage-ing* (©1995, Warner Books)) I plan to use *Women's Lives* with my **OWL-Circle** (Older Women's Legacy) this coming year.

A lovely and unique suggestion from Freed is that if we do not know facts and history of our foremothers, we should feel free to construct one which feels right for us. She begins, in fact with the story of Sarah from Genesis. The writing about Sarah in Genesis is sparse, but stories abound. She connects us to Sarah. She says:

"We yearn to reclaim the feminine legacies of our multigenerational past, whether we are dispossessed or securely linked to our ancestors. As we explore our unique connections to Sarah, we realize that we are part of the collective human tapestry. This connection could also be made through Asian, African, Native American or other women archetypes. Many of Freed's examples are from her own Jewish tradition which makes it no less universal."

Freed gives us "Reflection and writing" with suggested times and many options throughout the book. My very favorite is how she suggests turning our listed values into blessings. I have, on occasion, tried to write a legacy for my children and I have found that it ends up sounding like instructions or even orders. I know how much good a document or letter like that will do. Here is just one of her examples:

Instruction: Love deeply.

Blessing: May you be blessed as I have been with people to love deeply, and may your love be returned in abundance. (Judy Hostnick)

One of the last chapters, "Alternative Legacies" suggests planting a tree, making a collage or creating a visual, artistic legacy such as a quilt. And, finally, Freed makes editorial suggestions once your story is written.

A fine addition to the literature of memoir writing.