



Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen

Alix Kates Shulman

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Twenty-five years after it first shocked readers nationwide, this landmark book continues to hit home with its eye-opening portrayal of growing up female in middle-class America. Described by The New York Times as "the voice that has for three decades provided a lyrical narrative of the changing position of women in American society", Alix Kates Shulman takes a wry look in this sardonic, funny novel at a world of experience long considered taboo or trivial. As relevant and delicious as ever, this frank story of one woman's intellectual and sexual awakening is so superbly written and devastatingly -- sometimes frighteningly -- on target that readers will treasure this beauty for many years to come.

Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen Details

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Author : Alix Kates Shulman

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From Reader Review *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* for online ebook

Julie Ehlers says

After finishing Rebecca Traister's *Good and Mad*, all I wanted was to read another feminist book—but I also wanted to read some fiction. The solution? Alix Kates Shulman's novel *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, a "lost classic" of the second wave that was reissued in 2007. I'd read and enjoyed Shulman's 1996 memoir *Drinking the Rain*, so I had high hopes for this. But reading it was a mixed experience. Sure, I appreciated how revolutionary some of the sentiments were at the time, and I thought a lot of it was funny and interesting and smart, but the writing style was a bit awkward, the plot was kind of a mess, and ultimately the ending was unsatisfying. Sure, women back then were rebelling against their constrained existence, but that doesn't mean all of them could truly envision a different (better) way to live. The way this ended was probably realistic for the time, but that's exactly what makes it so disappointing to read today.

Lynn says

Summer of 1973, I was living a summer long experience with three friends on Madeira Beach in Florida before we would return to Arkansas for our senior year of college. One day we went to a nearby mall to see the new James Bond film, *Live and Let Die*. Afterward, I looked for a book and picked up *Memoirs of an Ex-prom Queen*. The book drew me in immediately and held me there until the end. Imagine my surprise when I discovered my beach read, a book I had chosen simply for entertainment, on the class requirements for Women in Literature the following spring!

Therese says

Why have I never heard of this book? It's brilliant. I'll be thinking of pieces of it for years.

Sasha is a vain short-sighted slut. She's also a brilliant, solitary philosopher who understands exactly who she is. She is abused by men in a horrible pre-sexual revolution world (was it really that bad? Unbearable if true), and always begs for more. She's selfish to an epic degree, while all the while being very thoughtful and generous in her sociopathy. She grows into a mother who will sacrifice herself for her children, no matter how many thoughtless abortions she might have had first.

I can't give this a dismissible label of "intriguing feminist portrait." Cuz I never would have gotten through it if were just that. It's a book about being below-average when you were supposed to be more. It's about how fantasy dies away in the face of real life. It illuminates the every-day submissions and games and compromises women cultivate(d?) from girlhood to survive. It's about being hollow.

And it's about turning 30. I find myself in this book, and that's nothing to brag about, but revealing all the same.

Michele says

I added this to my to-read shelf because it is overwhelmingly lauded as a brilliant feminist novel. And at times I did strongly relate--I can see how in the 70s some of the topics could have been seen as eye-opening. However, the protagonist is unbearably insipid, the story contradictory in far too many places, and ultimately I just didn't care enough to want to finish.

Kaye says

This was an interesting novel that addressed the helpless feelings of women during the 1950's-1960's, when all one could hope for is to become a wife of someone successful. Our heroine is a product of her time, and while she is intelligent, her real sense of value comes from her looks. It is grievously important to her to know that men find her attractive. She finds that slipping into the ascribed roles of wife, and later mother don't make her any more secure. The anxiety then surrounds a kind of frustrated fulfillment (which is to say, not fulfilled at all), and a fear of doing the right thing and maintaining her security. While younger budding feminists may not appreciate this novel, older ones will be able to relate. Although her predicament seems ridiculous in some aspects, there are residual bits of that thinking still embedded into our society.

Elizabeth says

Depressing. In fact, I think my book-related crabbiness sparked at least one argument with Sam.

Linda says

I read through this book with all the enthusiasm of one of Sasha's less exciting amorous encounters, going through the motions and mostly just glad when it was over.

I know the story was supposed to be some kind of feminist statement, and the parts of the book showing how women's options often were limited and emphasis placed on landing a husband in the mid-twentieth century were welcome reminders of how much has changed over the past couple generations. Even so, Sasha's relentless self-absorption along with a wide streak of self-destructiveness made me care less about her troubles as they too often were self-inflicted.

Still, I made it through until the end, demonstrating more focus and commitment than Sasha did for most of the story.

Kathleen Harvey says

I did not read this book when first written, when I might have thought it better than I do now, back when I

was younger and things seemed more black and white, the greys not so obvious. This strikes me as a manifesto, not a novel, and Sasha as an archetype, not a filled in character anyone could relate to. (I also agree with another reviewer here, who describes her as self-absorbed and self-destructive — inasmuch as she is a person at all.). I lived through this period myself - about 5 years behind Sasha, not far enough behind to make that big a difference, and a lot of what she encounters was true then and too much is still true, but still... I too almost couldn't get through it. Only because I had really related to Shulman's A Good Enough Daughter and because it was a book I felt I SHOULD have read, did I carry on to the equally disappointing end.

Jessica says

When I read this book in high school, I just was too inexperienced to understand it. I didn't really understand what date rape was, or what it's like to meld your identity in that of your guy's, or to feel like no matter how smart you are, what matters more is that you're pretty. I might have liked the book as a piece of fiction then, but I didn't *understand* it. I heard that the book reached it's 30th anniversary, I decided to read it again. Now, I read it with different eyes and appreciated it more, as Gloria Steinem is right: Women do indeed become feminist as they get old. I related to Sascha Davis, the ex-prom queen protagonist, unfortunately, quite a few times. She feels like a friend. If she were a real, live human, I hope she'd be a friend.

But I also couldn't relate to her at all at other times and that's a testament to the success of the second wave. There are all these reviews on Amazon, and Alix Kates Shulman herself writes in the intro, which say "relating to this book is a sad reminder of how far we *haven't* come." But I think so much has changed. Truthfully, so much *has* changed for the better. I felt more indignant and angry at all the bullshit my mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, etc. than I felt chagrined that those things are still occurring. I think a teenaged girl not feeling like she could say "no" without consequences and being date raped, being sexually harassed and belittled by male bosses, or embarrassing one's parents by divorcing, or being forbidden by one's husband to do certain things, are far less common. I hope Alix Kates Shulman knows that, and it makes her happy.

In any case, this isn't an especially well-written book. There are sentiments which are brilliant, as well as some gold-star sentences or paragraphs, but some passages are sappy and soggy, others are treacly, and the book has a feeling to it like it was passionately slapped together like hodge podge rather than written with slow and careful consideration. Maybe that's an "effect" the author tried to use to enable the reader to experience Sasha's anxiety and frantic feelings about her life....

I'm glad I re-read this. Maybe I'll be due for another reading next decade, and I'll relate to parts of it even more.

Steph says

While I loved this author's autobiographical memoir, Drinking the Rain, this book was tediously insipid. I couldn't finish it.

Sandy Samuel says

Didn't love it, didn't hate it

It was all about a girl who became prom queen in hs and learned how far her beauty takes her afterwards. Her father didn't help her perceptions.

I found no humor in it.

Nick Fulchino says

Absolutely great reflection on growing up in rape culture and trying to navigate the patriarchal society. A perfect read for today's times as well.

HeavyReader says

To me, this book is the story of a young woman ruining her life. I wasn't excited about the writing style or the story.

Warning: Sexual assault in this book may trigger some folks.

Jonna says

Okay, I didn't actually read this: I quit after three chapters. While the writing was quite nice, I found myself so depressed that I simply could not continue.

Wild Women Reviews says

All I have to say about this book is...the more things change, the more things stay the same. This feminist novel from the early 70s chronicles tells the tale of an intelligent ex-prom queen. Many of the themes that she faced in the 1950s and 60s are still being faced by many women today: 1) sexual harassment in the workplace; 2) being taken advantage of by young and older men; 3) out of wedlock pregnancy; 4) abortion; 5) societal expectations on women to marry and have children, and so on. It's a tragic tale of a young girl who craves independence but who is forced into situations against her nature due to societal conventions.

I gave the book a four instead of five because all throughout the book the protagonist somewhat bucked convention, but then she caved at the end to pressure.

