

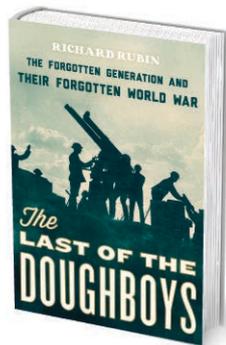
## ALUMNI BOOKS

# A Poignant Race against Time

Alum tells the stories of veterans of a forgotten war

BY SUSAN SELIGSON

“I figured those who fought could tell us things about that time, and that experience, that historians couldn’t,” says Richard Rubin (GRS’91) of the World War I veterans he interviewed for *The Last of the Doughboys* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), a book the author calls a “conversational history” of the “war to end all wars.” The epic four-year conflict gave the world trench warfare and poison mustard



gas, killed 5 million soldiers, wounded nearly 13 million others, and left an estimated 6.6 million civilians dead across Europe. At the Battle of the Somme alone, 1.3 million men fell.

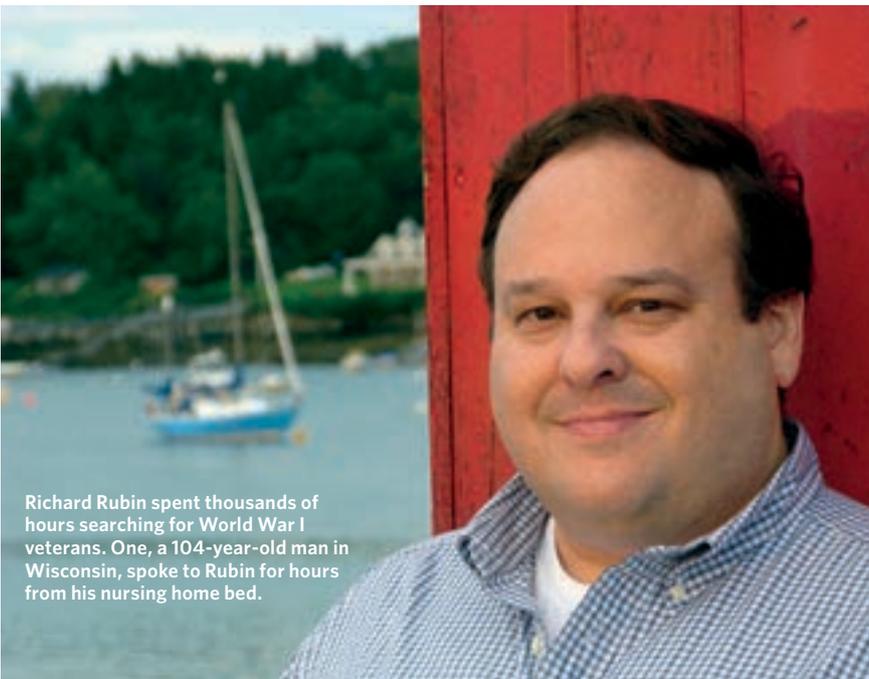
Yet World War I is a largely forgotten war—one most Americans today would be at a loss to explain—and the term “doughboys” to describe infantrymen has long been retired. “So I set out to get those stories while I still could,” says Rubin, a fiction writer and widely published journalist best known for his memoir about his years as a newspaper reporter in the rural Mississippi Delta, *Confederacy of Silence: A True*

*Tale of the New Old South* (Atria Books, 2002).

Researching *Doughboys* was a race against time. Rubin first had to find the veterans, all centenarians, then hope that their memories were mostly intact. There were no handy US databases—government, VFW, or otherwise—of the survivors. In fact, he found his first American veteran with the help of the government of France. “Eventually, I became pretty good at finding them on my own, too,” he says of the detective work involving “untold thousands of hours spent on the phone” or online, with most leads fizzling at a cemetery plot. But several dozen panned out. “I knew I was doing well,” he says, “when a few years after I started, someone at the Department of Veterans Affairs came to me for help in finding living American World War I veterans.”

When Rubin got to one veteran of what they used to call a “colored labor battalion” after being assured by his niece two weeks earlier that he was in good health, the man was unconscious in the hospital. He died the next morning. He was 109. Rubin fared better with the other veterans whose stories are told in *Doughboys*, subtitled *The Forgotten Generation and Their Forgotten World War*. One 104-year-old in Wisconsin, hooked up to oxygen, spoke to him for hours from his nursing home bed. “I was always a little nervous before every interview,” he says. “It was no small thing to talk with a 107-year-old

COURTESY OF RICHARD RUBIN



Richard Rubin spent thousands of hours searching for World War I veterans. One, a 104-year-old man in Wisconsin, spoke to Rubin for hours from his nursing home bed.

man or woman about things they saw and did 85 or 90 years ago.” Rubin, who refers to himself as “a sucker for things overlooked and underappreciated,” wrote the book because it was one he wanted to read. When it became apparent that no one else was going to write it, he says, “I did it myself.”

All the men and women he interviewed are gone now, but the book bears witness to a pivotal chapter in history. World War I “did nothing less than shape American national identity,” says the 46-year-old Rubin. He recalls his mother pointing out the VA hospital in the Bronx when he was seven or eight and telling him it still housed WWI veterans, several who had never recovered from being gassed at the front. “Just about everything you can think of, from civil rights and gender equality to agricultural policy, has roots in the First World War.”

Many Americans don’t even know which of their forbears fought in the war. One of the likely reasons—in addition to the conflict being overshadowed by World War II—is that those who lived through it were reluctant to speak about it, Rubin says. Nearly all of the veterans he interviewed were “really stoic about their experiences at the front,” he says. “I think that over the decades they didn’t talk about it much, not because they were terribly traumatized, though some were, but because that just wasn’t what you did back then. It wasn’t how a man conducted himself.”

In his introduction, Rubin says he doubts that a complete history of World War I has ever been written, or ever will be. This book is less a history than the story of America’s experience of the war, and about “how much of that we can still find and see and hear and touch. Because it really is everywhere,” he says, “even now that the last of the doughboys have left us.”

## CFA Alum Strikes Deep Chord with *The First Four Notes*

Book looks at world through Beethoven’s Fifth BY SUSAN SELIGSON

**In the two centuries since Ludwig van Beethoven wrote his Fifth Symphony, the piece’s iconic opening has etched itself into the human imagination. Those first four notes have become a kind of Rorschach test for a never-ending parade of musicologists, historians, and biographers speculating on Beethoven’s intentions.**

**In his book *The First Four Notes: Beethoven’s Fifth and the Human Imagination* (Knopf, 2012), Matthew Guerrieri takes readers on a wild, whimsical 277-page ride as he ponders the famous notes by pulling in far-flung references, from Steve McQueen to Napoleon Bonaparte to *A Clockwork Orange* to Unitarians. Although he plunges deep into the social, political, and musical world of the Romantic period, Guerrieri (CFA’97) doesn’t shy away from contemporary pop culture. Somehow, it works.**

**The book has earned widespread critical acclaim and landed Guerrieri, the *Boston Globe*’s classical music critic, an appearance on *The Colbert Report*. *Bostonia* spoke with Guerrieri about the power of those four notes, the enduring mystique of the Fifth, and why no words written on the subject will be the last.**

**BOSTONIA: An NPR piece on your book refers to the opening of the Fifth Symphony as “the most well-known notes in classical music.” Do you agree?**

**GUERRIERI:** I do. What makes them so particular is they’re probably the four notes of classical music that most people who aren’t even part of classical music would know. They have some sense of who Beethoven was and why the piece is famous. The piece has acquired a fame that’s transcended even the experience of the piece itself in a way.

**You write how the symphony begins “literally, with silence,” an eighth rest that translates into a beat given by conductors. But when Beethoven wrote it, there were no conductors. What was he up to?**

There were no conductors, but somebody would have gotten it started, usually the concertmaster. The rest is there almost for housekeeping,

because you have to fill out the bar. Beethoven could have started it as just a three-note pickup. But he decided to put the rest in for whatever reason, and probably didn’t think nearly as hard about it as I did. There’s this thing that happens right before the notes that’s in the score, that you don’t actually hear, just a sort of a little intellectual takeoff. It was too much fun to resist. But it is there to indicate this downbeat. And there’s this tradition with Beethoven’s Fifth that you’re supposed to get it started giving one beat, which happens to follow exactly where that rest is, so even the rest has become more important probably than Beethoven intended.

**How did you get the idea for the book?**

It was an editor’s idea, a man named Marty Asher, who at the time was working at Knopf. And he had this idea that there was a small book



MICHAEL LIONSTAR

Matthew Guerrieri says the first four notes of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony are “probably the four notes of classical music that most people who aren’t even part of classical music would know.”

there. I ended up delivering a lot more book than he expected, and even that amount of material was pretty much only scratching the surface of Beethoven and the history of the reception of this piece. And I was attracted to it just because of the sheer variety of angles you could come at it from. And the fact that from generation to generation, everybody has felt the need to take stock of it in terms of their own era also just makes it this wonderful timeline.

#### **In what ways was Beethoven a pioneer?**

Musically, he was an incremental innovator. It's very easy to trace what he's drawing from the previous generation, from Mozart, who he loved, and from Haydn, who he actually studied with for a time, although they didn't really get along. The reviewers talk about the fact that with Beethoven, there are so many more notes, or there's so much more going on. The ideas are coming just a little bit faster or a little bit more abruptly than they're accustomed to.

#### **You also paint him as a self-promoter.**

Yes, because he was the most famous musician at a time when composers were suddenly deemed to be more culturally important than they had previously been. And that's in the culture at large. He's also in the first generation of composers trying to make a career that's not completely based on aristocratic patronage. I mean, he still is dependent on patrons, but he's also dealing with publishing. He's putting on concerts himself. He's trying to manage his own fame as a way to increase his career prospects. And he's doing this for most of his life. And that's really something that starts right around that time, the idea that you can make your own way, that you can create your own fame, and that fame becomes something that you can use to advance your own career.

#### **Did you come to like Beethoven as a person?**

Parts of him. There are very attractive parts of his personality. There are very unattractive parts of his personality, partially because of who he was and

partially because of his reputation and his fame. Those tendencies on both sides tend to be somewhat amplified. You read stories of him spurning royalty and even insulting royalty in a way that sort of promoted the equality of men. And that's somewhat overstated. His own family life was terrible. He seems to have been able to lose friends with great skill. Reading Beethoven's biography, in a lot of ways, is just watching him having one falling out after another with all manner of people. He certainly seems to have been an incredibly irascible person and a very stubborn person. So it's hard to say. Would I have liked him as a person? Probably.

#### **The book, by necessity, sort of dances around the truth, doesn't it?**

One of the things that fueled the Fifth Symphony's fame was the fact that there are so many stories about it, so many anecdotes about it, so many things that Beethoven supposedly said about it, and the stories are really squishy in terms of historical veracity. The most famous one is that Beethoven called the opening four notes the sound of fate knocking at the door, which is a very suspicious story, because it comes from Anton Schindler, who was a very suspicious, and the only, source for that story, and it didn't come out until about 10 years after Beethoven died.

#### **Much has been written about when Beethoven became deaf. Do you think that's really a big deal?**

I don't think it's that big a deal. It's an interesting story, because of the persistence of the idea that he went suddenly, immediately, and profoundly deaf, that he was struck deaf, which is in some ways more dramatic and in some ways less dramatic than the actual story. The actual story is that his deafness was progressive: he first noticed it when he was quite young, and it deteriorated over a period of many years, which from a biographical standpoint is much more interesting. Because if you follow Beethoven through his life, you can see him gradually coming to terms with the fact that he's going deaf, even before he finally becomes completely deaf.

#### **A critic has written that your book restores a sense of beauty, wonderment, and profundity to classical music. Was that your intention?**

I don't think there's any getting around the fact that we live in an era when the primary way that most people interact with music is passive. We're passive listeners. There's a lot of music in the culture specifically designed to be listened to in a more or less passive way, which is not to say that that music can't yield a lot of really beautiful things when you listen to it in a more active way. I don't know if the book does this at all. But I would be very happy if it did in some small way encourage people to listen to music, to this piece, to any piece in a really active, really engaged way, knowing not only that there is this wealth of ideas and history behind any piece of music, classical, pop, or whatever, but also that their own life of ideas and of the mind can also be brought into that and can enrich that experience.

#### **What's it like for you now listening to the Fifth Symphony?**

The nice thing for me was, I don't remember when I first heard it. There are a lot of pieces that I remember the first time I heard them, but the Fifth Symphony has always just kind of been there, which means probably I came to it the way that most people, musicians or nonmusicians, come to it. It's just always been part of the culture. Immediately after writing the book, I said, okay, I'm not listening to it for six months at least. But now I hear it, and even before the piece starts, I can sort of cycle through all the collected conventional wisdom of the piece and review it all, reject it all, and then try and come to the piece fresh.

It's a great piece of music. And in a good performance, no matter how familiar you are with it, it still has an effect. It also helps that I tend to have a poor memory, which is bad for a pianist and one of the reasons I spent a lot of my time playing for singers, because you didn't have to memorize the music. But it's sort of like, every time I hear a piece, even a piece this familiar, there will always be something about the piece I've forgotten.

## REVIEWS

### Fiction

#### The Perfect Ghost

Linda Barnes (CFA'71)

Minotaur Books

EDGAR AWARD—

WINNING MYSTERY

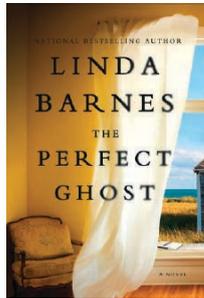
writer Barnes departs here from her Carlotta Carlyle series to tell a tangled tale of jealousy, ambition, and murder from the point of view of an agoraphobic young woman forced by circumstance to emerge

from her shell. The real talent behind a best-selling, charismatic celebrity biographer who dies in a Cape Cod car crash that may not have been an accident, Em is the ghostliest of ghostwriters. Mousy, awkward, and pathologically shy, she has remained invisible except for the fact, known only to her and Teddy, the biographer, that his pen name, T. E. Blakemore, is a composite of his surname and hers.

Set on the Cape and in Boston, the book's events unfold through Em's first-person narration, addressing the dead Teddy. Determined to finish her late partner's interviews for an in-progress "autobiography" of a famous and enigmatic film director, she talks her way into the great man's waterfront compound, where, in spite of herself, she falls prey to the seductions of wealth and fame.

Barnes' absorbing narrative is laced with police reports, interview and email transcripts, and even a fictional Wikipedia entry, which add notes of amplification and suspense and function as an objective counterpoint to Em's version of events. This is a fun read, not only for its merits as a page-turner. Barnes has a field day with the culture of celebrity, from unsavory media stalkers to predatory directors to the Hollywood golden boy dwarfed and trampled by his own outsized image. Her dialogue and characterizations are spot-on, and the story is rich, but never overloaded, with Shakespearean references and insights into the crafts of both biography and screenwriting.

Barnes has a deft touch for description and is adept at slowly peeling off



the layers of Em's tormented psyche. She's vulnerable and brittle all at once, a compelling and complicated creation. For most of the book we are inside her head, but that, we learn, might be a hall of mirrors. ss

#### Sight Reading

Daphne Kalotay (GRS'94, UNI'98)

HarperCollins

Set largely in Boston's classical music world from 1987 to 2007, Kalotay's novel is a narrative symphony

in which lives overlap like fugues, variations dance around recurring themes, and dissonance resolves in harmony.

Opening with a chance encounter between Hazel, long recovered from the sting of being abandoned by her husband, Nicholas, a world-renowned conductor, and Remy, the gifted violinist he left Hazel and their young daughter for, the story chronicles the loves and losses of these women. We also follow Nicholas and his conservatory colleague Yoni, who turns his affections toward Remy after a succession of footloose student paramours.

In the decades the book spans, Hazel and Remy emerge as flawed, but vibrantly human, often admirable characters who win the reader's respect and sympathy even when the decisions they make are self-sabotaging, petulant, or reckless toward others. Certain to hit a deep chord among readers for its unflinching, often lyrical examination of the nuances of marriage, parenthood, and divorce, this is a novel about hard-won wisdom, forgiveness, and the rewards of self-awareness.

But it is also a novel about music. As she did with dance in her novel *Russian Winter*, Kalotay writes about music not superficially, as is frequently the case in fiction, but profoundly and authoritatively. It's a world most of us get to see only from afar, but Kalotay hones in so we feel the sweat on Remy's brow when she's mastering a difficult

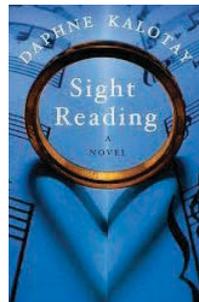
piece, experience Nicholas' quickening pulse and awe as he listens to a triumphant composition by a tormented friend. For these characters, music is also work, and so we empathize with Remy's weariness and self-doubt about her life as second-chair violinist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, playing audience favorites with increasingly less passion.

Through Kalotay's pitch-perfect prose, the reader is drawn in not just to the intellectual demands of making music, but the physical and emotional ones. Here is Remy during an audition for a prestigious master class: "All week she had practiced Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, really too much to learn (and by memory!) in just a few days. Her neck hurt from playing without a shoulder pad, and her fingertips were sore from having to press hard on the new gut strings, though her E string was still steel and the G wrapped in aluminum, the other two were fully

lamb's gut and heavier than what she was used to. But the pain was her reminder to do what Lesser had said: *step outside of herself*, think of the entire piece, not just her part, not just herself."

*Sight Reading* is also a meditation on honesty, and the many ways that decent people lie to others

and themselves, including the moral acrobatics typical of marital infidelity. But by the book's conclusion, a sense of calm and clarity prevails, and Hazel and Remy seem to have become the women they'd been struggling to be. ss



### Nonfiction

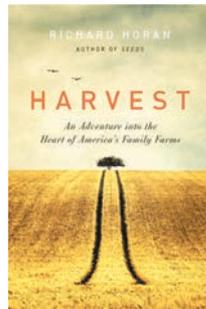
#### Harvest: An Adventure into the Heart of America's Family Farms

Richard Horan (CAS'81)

Harper Perennial

HORAN WAS UNEMPLOYED and sitting in a Wal-Mart parking lot when the seed for this book, his third, was planted. His idea was to travel around the country to help with the harvest of a dozen crops, sticking to small, organic, family-run farms "so that I could be sure to enjoy the fruits and vegetables of my labor" and

not produce “another depressing muckraker,” à la Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* or Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation*. From July through October, Horan traveled, mostly alone, to such home-



steads as Stephens Farm, in Kansas, to harvest turkey red wheat, Wiltse Farm, in New York, to pick blueberries, and Sierra Orchards, in California, for walnuts. Each family opened its home and pantry to this stranger for several days during the busiest time of the year. And each time he walked away with armfuls of fresh produce.

Besides learning how to properly pick Brussels sprouts and process wild rice, Horan discovered that working on a farm is backbreaking, sweaty labor—possibly not something he’s cut out for on a daily basis—and that at the end of a long day, a cold beer with fellow workers really hits the spot. “All around me the happy faces beamed with contentment,” he writes. “No one was rushed. No one was harried. No one was thinking beyond the moment.”

The farmers he met believe in their work, trust their product, and are fully invested in living sustainably on the slice of land that feeds them and their customers, and will, they hope, sustain future generations. Horan’s book often focuses more on his own mental space than on what is occurring all around him. He occasionally criticizes his hosts for their exuberance, mocks their housekeeping abilities, and bristles under the authority of experienced farmhands in the field.

Horan punctuates his travel memoir with tangential rants against a long list of hyphenated villains, including “global-warming pooh-poothers, omniscient free-market fundamentalists, mountaintop-removal mountebanks, atomic-energy-is-safe beguilers.”

Describing the harvesting of certain fruits and vegetables, Horan at times uses sexual metaphors. On raspberries: “The sensual feel of those

pulpy, hirsute dollops was soothing my savage breast. I was truly making love to those sexy little berries.” And on Brussels sprouts: “After a while I felt like I was participating in a kind of rough and tumble animal-on-vegetable lovemaking. I had to literally fondle and grope and yank and nose and

hump my groin and legs as well as my hands around those plants.” Possibly he should have traveled alone less often. LESLIE FRIDAY

**A Murder in Wellesley: The Inside Story of an Ivy-League Doctor’s Double Life, His Slain Wife, and the Trial That Gripped the Nation**

**By Tom Farmer (COM’84) and Marty Foley Northeastern University Press**

On Halloween morning in 1999, allergist Dirk Greineder made a frantic call to police dispatchers. He and his wife, May, had become separated while walking their dog near their Wellesley, Mass., home; he later found her lying dead in the woods, brutally stabbed.

Police suspected Greineder from the start. The wealthy doctor’s bizarre, awkward behavior raised red flags. He kept asking to change into clean clothes, rather than volunteering to stay at the police station to answer questions. Then police found a knife, gloves, and a small hammer hidden

near where witnesses saw the doctor emerge from the woods, contradicting his version of the chain of events. The final blow came when it was revealed that Greineder had been cheating on his wife for years with prostitutes and had solicited women on the internet.

Farmer, who covered the case for the *Boston Herald*, and Foley, a state police homicide detective who worked on the case, give the story plenty of jarring, sordid details, such as blood pattern interpretations, and a narrative laced with blunt dialogue from the interviews with the prostitutes Greineder regularly visited. But at the book’s heart is a sadder story of a



manipulative, controlling husband and his unhappy wife. Foley and Farmer interviewed the friends and family of May Greineder, who loved her husband and three adult children. The book is dedicated to victims of domestic violence, and some of its proceeds are being donated to Jane Doe Inc., a Massachusetts advocacy organization for victims of sexual and domestic violence. AMY LASKOWSKI

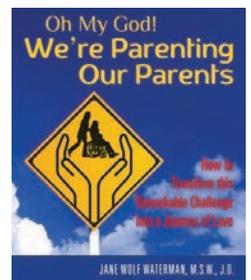
**Oh My God! We’re Parenting Our Parents**  
**Jane Wolf Waterman (LAW’71)**  
**POP Publications**

In December 1997, Waterman visited her elderly parents at their home in New York. What she found startled her. Both her mother and father had grown physically frail in the few months since her last visit. Her mother appeared confused, her father exhausted. Their apartment was in disarray, and neither had bathed in weeks. They needed help.

As she recounts in her book, Waterman had advantages many of the 10 million Americans over the age of 50 caring for aging parents don’t have: a law degree and experience working as a geriatric and family psychotherapist. Still, as an only child living thousands of miles away, she was overwhelmed as she began putting together a plan for their care. Did they need a caregiver or a housekeeper? How many hours of care would they need and how many days a week?

This deeply personal book recounts the author’s decadelong journey caring for her parents as they went from living at home with a caregiver to an assisted living facility, handling their battles with depression and dementia, and finally, enlisting hospice care for her father and skilled nursing care for her mother. The book is designed, Waterman says, to help others “transform this remarkable challenge into a journey of love.”

Waterman writes eloquently about the bewildering “full-blown role reversal” that grown children experience as they navigate the complicated thicket of financial, legal, and



health issues facing their parents. She offers practical suggestions on how to care for your elderly parents while still holding on to your own life. She stresses that this kind of caregiving isn't possible for all grown children. For some, she writes, there's simply too much emotional baggage to make that intimate level of care possible, and in that case it's best to designate it to a sibling, a neighbor, or a professional.

Despite her background as a geriatric psychotherapist and her dogged research at every turn of her parents' care, Waterman writes of encountering numerous roadblocks—most memorably the assisted living facility that instituted new rules and gave her only 48 hours to find a new place for her father. “The only predictable part about parenting our parents is continuous, unpredictable change,” she observes.

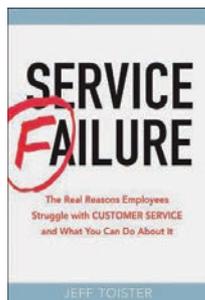
JOHN O'ROURKE

**Service Failure: The Real Reasons Employees Struggle with Customer Service and What You Can Do About It**  
Jeff Toister (SMG'97)

AMACOM

“Humans are not naturally good at customer service,” asserts Toister, who begins his highly readable guide with the tale of a befuddled sales associate at a clothing store who responded to the query, “Do you carry Dockers?” with, “I don't know.” That unhelpful employee was Toister himself at age 16.

Toister grew up to become a leading consultant and customer service trainer, and what he's learned along the way has led him to conclude that difficult bosses, ineffective procedures, employees' attitudes and emotions, and other “hidden obstacles” can all sabotage service. He doesn't let customers off the hook, and notes the frustrating disconnect between the way companies and customers rate service quality. In fact, he says, customers are to blame for nearly a third of poor service experiences. Employees may not consider customer service their primary job, and some are actually motivated to deliver poor performance,



he says, citing pandemic afflictions, such as “employee disengagement” and “learned helplessness.”

He believes that empathy can be taught, and he outlines ways employers can encourage employees to respect and understand customers. Overall, his message is a managerial version of the golden rule. Bosses can secure what he calls employee “buy-in,” not just by hiring whenever possible people who love their jobs, but by involving frontline employees in decision-making and problem-solving, aligning customer tips or commissions with “team goals rather than individual accomplishments,” and making employee recognition “an unexpected event” to be offered only after good performance.

The book is peppered with amusing tales of breakdowns in service and civility, such as the fast food worker who glared at the author when he couldn't produce the correct change and declared, “I hate people like you.” And Toister doesn't spare himself. He launches a chapter on “helping employees overcome their own emotions” by confessing that while working as a customer service manager, a job he ironically despised, he hung up on a customer, letting “a swirl of negative emotions” get the best of him. It could, he's quick to point out, happen to anyone. ss

**Women, Sex, Power & Pleasure: Getting the Life (and Sex) You Want**  
Evelyn Resh (SPH'00)

Hay House

If sex is a banquet, too many of today's “amazing” women are in starvation mode, says Resh, a sexuality counselor and nurse-midwife. A less-than-satisfying sex life, or lack of one altogether, “is one of the most painful manifestations of a loss of pleasure, and it's also one of the touchiest subjects to address,” says Resh, who counsels women who have lost any

sense of a balance between career, family, and what she calls “sustainable self-care.”

Her book is a direct, engaging pep talk and prescription reminding women of the rewards of heaping their plates high, and guiding them back to the table. In separate chapters she takes on the most commonly heard excuses for putting sex on the back burner or in the deep freeze. She offers empathetic, encouraging advice to women who say they're not having sex because they're busy, exhausted, menopausal, or feeling fat or otherwise unsexy. Many women are in what Resh calls “a wrestling match with pleasure,” which is too often confused with happiness. “Pleasure by definition includes sensuality,” she writes. “Happiness does not.” She urges “asensualized” women to re-embrace not just sex, but other sensual pleasures women routinely dismiss or deny themselves.

Beneath the “shining exterior” of today's multitasking women, she writes, are lives focused exclusively on “getting the job done—whatever the job is.” When she examines conflicts in heterosexual relationships (“Honestly, It's All He Thinks About” is one chapter title), Resh is generous toward the

male as well as the female perspective and doesn't lay blame. She coaches women to examine their feelings and needs and become their own “activists.” An active and satisfying relationship with sex and life's pleasures depends, she writes, “on constant monitoring of the state of our emotional health and its fortitude.”

Although it includes a chapter examining the very real challenges of maintaining a vibrant sex life in the throes of new motherhood, chronic illness, or grief, the book's most vigorous refrain is that sex is important, and people in loving relationships shouldn't live without it, because to do so “squashes one of the greatest sources of pleasure—being present in the moment and giving your undivided attention to yourself and your mate.” ss ■

