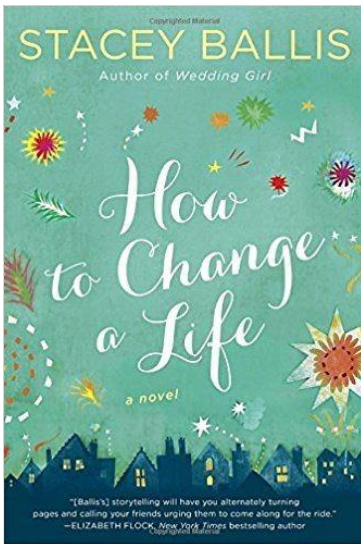


# High School Doesn't End Like a Musical



We all have those friends from high school who we don't talk to anymore. You say you'll keep in touch after graduation, but then life happens. You make new friends, you look for the best job, and you hope to find your Prince(ss) Charming. Maybe you just drift apart from your friends, but eventually something forces you back in like a magnet and you don't want to pull away.

In How to Change a Life, by Stacey Ballis, this situation is all too familiar for thirty-nine year old Eloise. Eloise lives a comfortable life as a chef for a rich family in Chicago. Her social life mostly consists of walking her dog, Simca, hanging out with her friend Marcy, making dinner for an old man named Lawrence, and visiting her mother. Everything seems to be going well until Eloise finds out that her favorite high school teacher, Mrs. O'Connor, has passed away. When Eloise goes to the wake, she discovers that her former two best friends are also at the funeral home to grieve. Once the trio reunites, nothing is the same. After a night of drinking, they decide to make

a bucket list of things to accomplish before their fortieth birthdays. The person who completes the tasks last has to donate five grand in Mrs. O'Connor's name. Eloise, Lynne, and Teresa make social, career-oriented, and dating goals to fulfill. At first,

Eloise is unhappy about her goals, but at Lawrence's annual Halloween party, she meets someone who might just be able to make her forget about her last romance.



**“But everyone ends up being themselves in the end. And if you tell them you need them to be the person they promised you in the beginning and they don’t want to be that guy, you have to just move them along.”**

How to Change a Life is filled with heartwarming scenes that make you remember the true feeling of being loved (platonic and non-platonic). The family that Eloise works for is the sweetest and is always there to make up for the moments that break your heart. Ballis does an excellent job of setting the scenes and painting the images of her characters. The themes of the novel can be analyzed clearly by the reader and the message of the novel is sweet, yet honest.

The novel definitely had shining moments, but unfortunately, those moments weren't sufficient to make this story reach its full potential. Although it contained some charming

How to Change a Life

By Stacey Ballis

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<http://www.riversendbookstore.com/book/9780425276624>

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sections, the characters could have had more depth.

Despite how realistic some of the characters were, it

couldn't make up for the lack of connection that I felt

with them. I wanted to like Ballis' portrayal of her

characters, but I just felt like I was along for the ride in

this story. Eloise still seemed ordinary even though she

was a dynamic character. Her new personality wasn't enough to make you feel like her story was something

worth sharing. Eloise changed herself because of a man, and that story has been touched upon a

lot in literature and movies. There aren't nearly as many books about strong female characters

who do things for themselves instead of for a significant other. I found myself more curious

about the side characters because their lives concerned topics that aren't really written about,

like kids cooking professionally.

In addition, the characters were unique in their own little ways, but it was difficult to take

some of them seriously. Eloise's relationship with Shawn seemed a bit boring even though this

relationship is supposed to be extraordinary. Their gestures that they make for each other appear

to be cheesy and unsurprising. There are a few cliché parts, which makes the dialogue seem

unconvincing. Shawn is the only black character, and his race is mainly used to create a potential

conflict. Lawrence, the token gay character, is not quite a stereotype, but his mannerisms are

expected. His gayness is used mostly to further the plot between the straight characters. Eloise's choices during conflicts make her hard to feel sorry for because other characters give her good advice, which she doesn't listen to.

Ballis' use of telling for the majority of the story instead of showing greatly impacts the book. Her redundancy partly diminishes the effect that the story has on the reader. Because Ballis mostly shows emotion through Eloise's thoughts, we have to take Eloise's word for the manner in which an event happens rather than making the conclusion for ourselves. In the novel, she compares sex with her ex-lover, Bernard, to eating a roast duck. The audience has nothing to go on except her opinion. We will never know if sex with Bernard is like eating a roast duck because those things really shouldn't be compared and it's not something that's easy to imagine.

Overall, the book is the result of a positive idea that could have been improved with stylistic choices. That being said, I came away from it with three thoughts. First, good stories should lead you to places that you don't expect. Second, if you want accurate minority characters, read a book with a main character that belongs to a minority or choose an author that is a minority. Third, if you want to read a realistic book, you might want to let this one stay on the shelves.

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