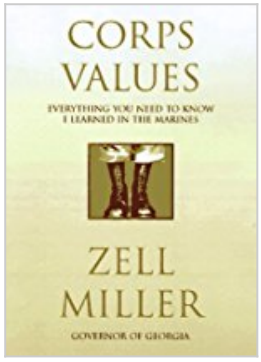

Corps Values

By Zell Miller

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Call it Robert Fulghum by way of John Wayne... In 1953, Zell Miller was as low as he could get. He'd dropped out of college after being made to feel inferior because of his "hillbilly" background and wound up in jail one weekend after getting drunk on moonshine and driving his car into a ditch. In an effort to turn his life around, he signed up for marine boot camp. The experience changed his life, and he remains convinced that the values he learned during his 90 days at Parris Island are "the only basis upon which diversity can coexist with commonality and all people can pursue individual goals for themselves while contributing to the general well-being and advancement of society as a whole." These simple values, from neatness and punctuality to discipline and loyalty, are for Miller the basis of a strong civil society. Although some readers may find some of his notions--such as his frustration at seeing kids wear caps backwards--a bit extreme, Miller reminds us that any organization that pumped out men like Bernard Shaw, Don Imus, Ted Williams, and Art Buchwald must have *something* going for it.

From the Publisher
"When it comes to politics and politicians, we don't agree on much, but one thing we do agree on is that Gov. Zell Miller is a helluva man and he has written a helluva book!"
--James Carville and Mary Matalin

"Corps Values touches at the core of what has made America great."
--Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives

"Gov. Zell Miller gives the nation hope for its future by reinforcing 'corps' values which made this country great. I love it!"
--Max Cleland, U.S. Senator, Georgia

"This book should serve as a compass for the reader to evaluate and define more clearly his or her responsibilities to family and country."
--James E. Livingston, Jr., Major General, USMC (Ret.), Medal of Honor winner

"As a brother Marine, it's easy to see why Zell Miller has been so successful. He has hit a grand slam with this book."
--Ted Williams, Baseball Hall of Famer

Prologue

Drunk.

Dirty, disheveled and dejected, I sat crosslegged on the floor of the Gilmer County Jail in the Appalachian town of Ellijay, Georgia. It was a hot Saturday night in August of 1953.

Drunk out of my skull from rot-gut moonshine liquor, I had side-swiped a car and run headlong into a ditch. Within minutes I was handcuffed, thrown into the back of the sheriff's car and carted off to where I belonged.

Behind bars with me were four others, all of us in the same dark cell. Three old, grizzled mountaineers in bib overalls and a "dandy" in seersucker pants and what had once been a white starched shirt. And me. All were older and all were just as drunk as I was.

I was 21 years old. One thing was clear in my woozy head: I was in a bad, bad situation and it was no one's fault but my own.

Certainly not my mama's. Birdie Bryan Miller had raised me and my sister alone, a "single mother" long before that term became well known. My father had died when I was 17 days old. My mama didn't just do the best she could; she did the best anyone could. She raised us in a loving home, took us to church twice each Sunday, taught us about values and read to us. *The Little Engine That Could* was my favorite story.

We grew up in a house built from rocks that my mother had hauled out of a nearby creek. My six-year-old sister watched me on a blanket under a tree near the creek while my mother stooped and lifted and waded in that cold mountain water day after day as she stacked hundreds of beautiful, smooth rocks on the creek bank.

Today, that rock house is the Miller home place and, in certain places, her handprints in the concrete are still visible.

Her handprints were on me as well. And that night I sat in jail with my head in my hands wondering how anyone could have sunk so low. How could anyone have done their mother so wrong?

The life into which I was born in the mountain environment of all-white Towns County, Georgia, in 1932 was as different as night is from day from the metropolitan, multicultural Atlanta, Georgia, I now live in. Poverty was as general then as it is stratified along class lines now. There were no race or religion problems, because we were all of the same color and similar Protestant persuasions. There were some family feuds and political rifts between Democrats and Republicans, but nothing even closely approximating the divisions and conflicts of modern, urban society.

However narrow or insular the outlook of the average citizen of my native area might have been, character--as personified by honesty and respect for parents, elders, peers and self--was taught by word and example and emulated by deed. Discipline was expected and, if necessary, enforced by hickory sticks and woodshed visits. Children had chores which they were expected to perform as faithfully and thoroughly as their school homework, and the youngster who "got a whippin'" at school could expect to get another when he or she got home. Teachers were regarded as sacrosanct as parents were.

Life was a serious business, and it was treated as such. Children were trained from the earliest to speak only when spoken to and to respond to their elders with the appropriate "Yes, sir" or "No, ma'am." Whining and "talking back," or "sassin'," were certain to bring swift retribution.

My mother was a talented artist who was regarded by some as an independent and free spirit and different in her ideas and approach to life's trials and tribulations. But she worked twice as hard as any man I ever knew to educate her two children. My maiden aunt, Verdie Miller, was a teacher of awesome presence, a demanding taskmaster, and loving confidant. I also had an English teacher, Edna Herren, who was a major influence on me as a student.

But with all that I had going for me, I did not have a male role model in my life. And when I left my cocoon of insulated, mountain, female-dominated life, I found myself overly challenged and shockingly frustrated. The worldly, metropolitan atmosphere of Emory University in Atlanta was very different from

the safe and sedate atmosphere of Young Harris College.

I felt overwhelmed by the sophistication of my fellow students, and for the first time--but not the last--had someone laugh at the twang of my "hillbilly" accent. The classes were harder, the students more articulate, and I became lonely, miserable, and depressed. A feeling of inferiority permeated my whole being. Unlike the "Little Engine," I quit, dropped out, and returned to my mountain home, to the great disappointment of my mother, my aunt, and the arched brows of the town and college gentry, who had wondered if the orphaned boy would be able to make it in the real world. I began to drink, run wild, and finally wound up in that drunk tank in Ellijay.

And so when my buddy Max Nicholson finally came and bailed me out Sunday afternoon, I went home, cleaned up, and then, with my tail between my legs, sneaked onto the back pew of Sharp Memorial Methodist Church. As Pastor Tom Smith spoke at that Sunday evening service and the choir sang those old familiar hymns I knew by heart, I sat alone, surrounded by my shame.

I realized I needed more than the tender mercies of my little local church, more even than a strong mother and loving friends had been able to provide. I was heading in the wrong direction, and I knew it. My thoughts drifted back to a sign I had seen in Atlanta: "The Marines: We make men," it proclaimed. Then and there I decided either to cure or kill myself by signing up for a three-year enlistment in that elite outfit.

The kill almost came before the cure, but it was the turning point of my life. Everything that has happened to me since has been at least an indirect product of that decision, and, in the twelve weeks of hell and transformation that were Marine Corps boot camp, I learned the values of achieving a successful life that have guided and sustained me on the course which, although sometimes checkered and detoured, I have followed ever since. That weak, mixed-up lad on the back pew never came back home; a strong, disciplined man in olive drab did. And when that guy quit at Emory, it was the last time he quit at anything.

The best analogy I have heard describing what it is like to go through Marine Corps boot camp is that it is the closest thing to a birth experience grown men will ever go through. The main difference is the gestation period is compressed into three instead of nine months.

Even the geography of Parris Island, South Carolina, site of Marine Corps boot camp, can be seen by a raw recruit as the equivalent of the female birthing anatomy. It is configured like a giant womb into which the only entry and exit is a two-mile-long causeway ending in a two-lane bridge over Archer's Creek, a tidal arm of Broad River. The base, which is surrounded by alligator-infested swamps, is the uterus, and the recruits, who are introduced into it in platoon-sized increments of approximately 74, are the fertilized eggs. The 65 or so who manage to take root and survive the rigorous and demanding training of the following twelve weeks subsequently emerge from the same channel as newborn Marines who will never again look upon life and its challenges as they did some 90 days earlier.

In the course of one season of the calendar, boot camp turns sometimes aimless youths into proud and self-disciplined Marines who have well-honed senses of self-esteem and dedication to themselves, their mission, and their country. The differences of economic classes and prejudices of race and religion which they brought with them have been transformed into respect for others and an ability to follow orders to achieve mutual goals.

Humorist Art Buchwald, one of the most famous alumni of the Marines, characterized his Corps training and discipline as "the right service in the right place at the right time." He called the experience "a very painful one, which is exactly how the Marines intend it to be," explaining that the purpose of boot camp is "to break

you down, and then rebuild you into the person . . . who will never question an order, who will always worry about his buddy, and who, someday, will walk as tall as John Wayne."

That is also the goal of this book.

Of course, a lot of books have been written about values in the past few years. William Bennett had a best-seller, *The Book of Virtues*, and has made an industry out of speaking and writing about them from his point of view. I loved his book and bought copies for my children and, when his children's edition came out, gave copies to my grandchildren. I found myself in general--and, on some points, enthusiastic--agreement with most of his premises.

Even earlier, Robert Fulghum had a mega-literary hit with his *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.* I devoured it, too, although it is obvious that I myself was a later bloomer in the achievement of such wisdom.

More recently, the entire nation was deluged during the 1996 presidential campaign with debates and oratory about the national need for a renewal of "family values." This debate was highlighted by some rather pointed, and sometimes personal, exchanges on what those values should be and how best to inculcate them in our children as guiding principles for successful lives. Whether it takes a "family" or a "village"--or, as ...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Hans Diaz:

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