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Mayflower Madam: The Secret Life of Sydney Biddle Barrows

Sydney Biddle Barrows , William Novak

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With flair, humor, and style, Sydney Biddle Barrows tells the whole intriguing story of how she merged business and sex to create Cachet--the escort service of choice among rich, powerful, and prominent men. Adapting business management methods of the 1980s to the world's oldest profession, in this frank, surprising, and insightful, book, Ms. Barrows emerges as a woman who seized a chance and made the most of it.

Mayflower Madam: The Secret Life of Sydney Biddle Barrows Details

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From Reader Review Mayflower Madam: The Secret Life of Sydney Biddle Barrows for online ebook

Lisa says

You can't help but be in awe. Of the story, the business, the girls, the clients. It's a fascinating industry and she developed a well-run business simply based on how she wanted to be treated herself.

Flora says

This is up there with "Mommie Dearest" and "Monica's Story" for delivering the goods, and damn well -- no frills, no fuss, just good old-fashioned engrossing, horrifying, salacious smut. There's a certain poetry to it, isn't it? No, there isn't. That's what makes it good.

Sharon says

A fascinating book about the woman with a high society background who ended up becoming a madam to high-priced call girls. She makes some great points about the idiocy behind enforcement of anti-prostitution laws, plus, how often do you get a view of this strange world?

Blue Moon says

Is my favorite story of love.

HeavyReader says

I read this book when I was in college. Did my mom have a copy or did I pick it up used somewhere? I duuno, but reading about high class prostitution was really titilating. I remember the prostitutes were required to wear business/professional clothes so they did not stand out as whores, with really tasteful yet sexy underwear.

Skyqueen says

Read this when it first came out back in the 80's and AT THAT TIME it was near scandalous!! Now today it's an every other week occurrence of madams popping up everywhere. She was just first in publishing. Thinking of reading it again since it came up in recent conversation at a lingerie shop and, let's face it, the oldest profession never really changes does it?? Just the technology by which it is conducted. Wonder what she's doing today at around 70??

Wendi says

Besides being poorly written, this book is just a sugar coated look at the world of prostitution. Kind of the "Pretty Woman" of literature, but not nearly as entertaining.

This book is repetitive to say the least. It seems to me that most of the descriptions of what the girls did (and to whom) was discussed over and over and over again. It got boring.

My other issue with the book is it's constant protestations that prostitution is just a business and a victimless crime. If the man is single, why should he not spend his money on a sure thing? It's his money after all. If the man is married or in a relationship his excuse is that he is too stressed at home, he cannot tell his wife the things he can tell the prostitute, and that he is searching for something that his wife (obviously too frigid) won't do. These men are faultless for anything, they're just very busy business men who want the company of a woman who asks nothing of him. I just think that's a cop out.

But so goes the book - it is what it is, a book about a woman who was busted for illegally running an escort service. The interesting parts, if they can be believed, are the business strategies she used to make sure the women in her employ were safe and got paid well for their services. But again, there was this glossy fakeness to how happy and wonderful the business was. The descriptions of the escorts hanging out in the main office were described to be like slumber parties except with champagne flowing. Shopping trips to make sure all the women were dressed conservatively. Long lists of training on how to be the perfect escort. The training "transcripts" even read as being too good to be true.

Maybe that's what it really comes down to - the book's description of the business and Sidney is just too good to be true.

She's now a consultant with her very own scam-looking website where you can buy her books on how to be a better business person. <http://sydneybarrows.com/>

Mizmoose says

Amazing tale of a woman who ran an out-call service as if it were any other business, and how she succeeded. Her employees were well treated (to the point where they could refuse calls that made them uncomfortable) and well paid, and by concentrating on quality instead of quantity she made a solid business. In my mind, this book is further proof that sex work doesn't have to be nasty, illicit and degrading and that this should be completely legal.

Siddharth says

A fantastic book on a topic that I've never read about before. Absolutely adorable.. perhaps partly because William Novak (writer of Iacocca) helped write this book.

Diana says

For the past few years, most of my reading material has been chosen by whatever I can find on the shelves at second-hand stores. Imagine my surprise and delight when I found this title from the 1980s in almost pristine condition on the shelf at Value Village.

Back in the day, this was a big story: a woman of high-class ancestry busted for running a high-class prostitution service. I remember seeing the headlines and all the news stories on TV.

The book was really good. She starts out telling a bit about her background and childhood, then goes on to show how she got the idea to start the business and how she ran it. The details are pretty fascinating, and she realized something early on that I think all top-notch entrepreneurs realize: The better you treat your employees, the more loyal they are to you and the better your business runs. Happy employees = happy clients = booming business.

Any business owner could learn a thing or two from Sydney Biddle Barrows.

Suzanne Hurst says

If you are looking for a raunchy read, this is not it. Published in 1986, the book tells the story of the management of New York City's most elegant escort service, run by Sydney Biddle Barrows (the Mayflower Madam). A fascinating, sometimes funny view of the world's oldest profession adapted to the management methods of the 1980's.

Gil Burket says

Read it back in the 1980's. Believe it or not,I found the underground business aspect of it more interesting than anything else. I remember reading one of their innovations was to give their ladies a credit card charge plate that could fit in a purse. When the charges were run by the card, they were for something innocuous, like "Joe's Deli". It's remarkable the operation ran unexposed for as long as it did, given some of their clientele. One wonders if it would even survive today with all of the exposure the internet provides.

M.E. Logan says

Interesting. It seems she ran a good business, and what initially was a landlord/tenant squabble became a big case. I don't understand why people spent time on murders and robbers instead of prostitution.

Kim Hamilton says

I've wanted to read this since college and never got around to it, but now I finally have. A fascinating book about the woman from high society ancestors heritage who became a madam to a high-priced escort service in NYC in the 80s. Titillating details of a world that is just unimaginable.

Jessica says

Reading Sydney's memoir has further convinced me that prostitution needs to be legalized. No matter how many laws you make, this business is obviously not deterred and in the end it bogs down the court system. I think Sydney said it best in the book when she said "A call girl is simply a woman who hates poverty more than she hates sin." Legalizing prostitution would allow the industry to set standards and make it safer for all those who participate. I really respected that Sydney saw how appalling other agencies treated their employees and that she was determined to be fair and treat her employees well. As a result her employees didn't feel broken, trapped or degraded in any way. She had a policy that if a girl didn't feel comfortable for any reason they could leave a call, even if that reason was they just weren't attracted to the man. She set up health benefits for her employees and paid them fairly. This is sorely lacking in the current industry and I believe legalizing prostitution so these women aren't demonized is the only way to improve the working conditions. For better or worse call girls, escorts, prostitutes are business women. Legalizing it would allow them to negotiate their own terms, ensure that they could run background checks on potential clients, arrange safe meeting places, etc. Sydney also required the men that came to her escort service were respectful to her girls. She insisted that the men treat them with respect and consideration and if she found out a client had not acted with her employees best interest in mind she had no problem confronting them and making sure they knew that they would have to change. I was amazed that she would do this for her girls regarding some very mundane details. One girl told her that the client had no food or beverage in his house and when she asked for a drink he gave her warm tap water in a paper cup. Sydney called the client and requested that at the very least he stock some diet soda and proper glasses for the girls he hired. I was amazed at how important these woman's feelings were to her. I would love to hear this story from the escorts side. I'd be curious to see if she was as fair and judicial as she says, however I don't get the feeling this is the author's way of grandstanding about what a savior she was.

This book had some amazing facts a figures. One of the figures Sydney references is that each time a prostitute is arrested it costs the taxpayers \$3000.00. And that was back in 1984! I can't imagine what that figure is now. The government appears to have it priorities screwed up, the mere fact that they would rather spend \$3000 to bust a prostitute thereby giving her a criminal record which makes it even harder for these women to find what the government deems "legitimate" work rather than take that money and devote it to say job training, or job resources or even public aid infuriates me. \$3000.00 on a victimless crime. I realize often times prostitution is linked with other crimes such as drug use, drug dealing, domestic violence, and robbery, I also believe this is the very reason the government needs to legalize this industry so it can be regulated and improved. It is more often than not that it is these women who suffer the consequences of their business as opposed to their clients. It is one of the worst double standards out there. These women deserve to be protected.

There were two things that did irk me. First was her apologist attitude regarding married men using her service to cheat on their wives. While I realize if men are willing to cheat on their spouses they will do so regardless, however I have trouble reconciling the fact that this business does enable these types of men to do so almost guilt free and without major risk of being caught. Second, I was equally shocked when she wrote that she discouraged the use of prophylactics. Granted this was the early eighties and the public wasn't as well educated to the risks associated with unprotected copulation, but I still feel this fact was overly

irresponsible even in such a day and age. I truly hope none of her girls ever contracted AIDS or any other disease for that matter.

All in all it was a well written and engaging book that really opened my eyes further.
