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The Deans' Bible Reading Group Guide

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The Deans’ Bible is a book that opens doors to a variety of discussion topics that are relevant for women and men today: the call for more women in administrative positions, equal pay for equal work, equality in higher education, the example of women helping other women, and the courage to wear the mantel of inclusion regardless of gender, sexual orientation, color, or physical disability.

The women of The Deans’ Bible started the conversation. You and your group can continue the still necessary dialogue.

Reading Guide available online:
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Author Angie Klink holds the Bible originally owned by Purdue’s first part-time Dean of Women Carolyn Shoemaker. For nearly a century, the Bible was passed down from dean to dean as a symbol of a shared profession and impassioned call to place students first as the women strove, against overwhelming odds, for parity on a university campus.

The Deans’ Bible
Five Purdue Women and Their Quest for Equality
Angie Klink
1. The deans experienced an extraordinary friendship that lasted throughout their lifetimes. Why are relationships between women important? Have you experienced such a sisterhood? Do men form similar woven bonds?

2. How did the military experiences of three of the deans affect their lives and the lives of their students and colleagues?

3. Helen Schleman said she was born fifty years before her time. As dean of women in the 1940s-1960s, Helen experienced challenges to convince female students and the male administration that a college degree was important for women. Is there still a stigma, perhaps covert, for women in college today?

4. Helen Schleman was a wonderful mentor to her staff and her students. She was willing to “share,” via lunches and parties in her home, the influential women she knew who visited the Purdue campus, such as engineer Lillian Gilbreth. Have you experienced similar mentoring?

5. The deans led with integrity, and as a group they acted as the “checkpoint” for one another as to the rightness and wrongness of a situation. It's easier to stand your ground when you know you have someone behind you supporting your stance. How can women today change the world by being a “checkpoint” for others?

6. Through forthright actions and eloquent speeches, the deans were stellar role models as effective change agents. Compare the deans’ methods of calling for change with the notorious speech and actions by *Exponent* editor Bill Smoot in the fall of 1968.

7. Helen Schleman emphasized “life planning” for women students. How do you juggle a life plan while also remaining open to seizing opportunities that come along?

8. Discuss the significance of the icons of connection shared by the deans and others: Carolyn Shoemaker’s Bible, Purdue pendant watches, Celestial Chicken Salad, Dean of Women Punch, and Helen’s Hankie Club.

9. Discuss the impact of legislation on the story arc of *The Deans’ Bible*: the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote, creation of the World War II Women’s Reserves, President Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women, the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, President Nixon’s Task Force on Women’s Rights and Responsibilities, Title IX, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, ADA, and the Freedom of Information Act.

10. Discuss the books that were important to the life of the deans: *Gone with the Wind, Nancy Drew, And Ladies of the Club*, poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay, *The Idiot, The Feminine Mystique*, and *The Velveteen Rabbit*. What books made an impact on your life?

11. The deans were role models in retirement. Helen continued to monitor salaries and positions for women at Purdue, Bev entered politics, Barb was a founding member of Indiana Governor Birch Bayh’s Commission on Women, and Betty transformed the Purdue University Retirees Association. Through modeling, the deans’ final quest for equality was for those victimized by ageism. Discuss ageism in our culture.