

<http://www.calendarlive.com/books/reviews/cl-et-book29jan29,0,471111.story?coll=cl-books-util>

BOOK REVIEW

'You're Not the Boss of Me' by Erika Schickel

The zany girlfriend becomes the mom.

By Amy Wallen
Special to The Times

January 29, 2007

ERIKA SCHICKEL, the author of "You're Not the Boss of Me," is the girlfriend we had in high school and college who was soda-through-the-nose hilarious. We never imagined her as a mother, but in this collection of essays, Schickel shows us how that zany girlfriend became a mom.

Quirkiness aside, she's the mom we should all aspire to be: real. Schickel takes us beyond the facade, letting us see inside the woman who saw everything as a joke.

"Boss of Me" is neither another instruction manual advising us on coping with breakfast cereal confrontations, lost children in the park and toilet training, nor is it a book of cutesy stories about kids doing the darndest things. Schickel's collection is anything but strained fruit and should be required reading for all uptight moms attempting to raise their preschool *summa cum laudes* with flawless parenting.

"Boss of Me" begins with Schickel's own physical growth during pregnancy, and her descriptions are never pabulum. "Week 20 — Your baby is now the size of a small clutch purse," she tells us. "Week 25 — Your baby is now the size of a crock pot.... Week 36 — Your baby is now the size of a Barcalounger."

Schickel takes us into a Jiffy Pop version of playgrounds, wiping butts, the multicultural school day and ... lap dances at strip joints.

She challenges us to have fun like she always has. Yep, Schickel shows us what relaxes her and what keeps her mojo going as a mommy.

Although lap dances might not be expected on a mom's night out with her girlfriends, Schickel has learned that "a woman is so much more than the sum of her ever-changing body parts."

She's not a "Trad-mom" or an "Alterna-mom" either. "Trad-moms read labels for caloric content, Alterna-Moms read labels for potential toxins," she explains. "Trad-moms put their toddlers on leashes at Disneyland, while Alterna-Moms strap their young to their bodies and hike them up mountains."

The book delivers the audacity promised by the title, not as much in regard to raising kids as in the author's learning to take charge of her life. By doing so, Schickel understands — and so does the reader

— the internal pain behind her humor. Along the way, we find out that she stashed a marijuana supply in a Play-Doh can — and that her lingering addiction offered another place to hide.

When her parents divorced, "dividing up everything they owned: records, books, friends — us," and Schickel was sent to boarding school, sisters were separated. She observes how her own daughters experience the love-hate relationship of sisterhood that she missed out on.

Ultimately, Schickel must come to terms with her inability to let others take care of her, that she can't always be the boss of herself. While recovering from foot surgery, she makes us laugh as she mines the fields of her psyche. But sometimes this sounds too much like a therapist explaining why she couldn't let herself heal.

Maybe Schickel thought a clinical tone at certain moments would keep her rich chocolate writing from turning into marshmallow fluff, but she's not that kind of mom — or writer, either. Like a lap dance taken to the peak of arousal, the more poignant scenes could have used that last beat of climax.

Schickel says she at first resisted becoming a writer and went into acting, but "You're Not the Boss of Me" proves she made the right choice. She does her forefathers, uncles and cousins proud.

She's a smart mom, an honest writer and, gradually, a not-so-hard-on-herself boss. And she's still the girlfriend we love to hang out with — we giggle and snort ourselves silly before we can put this book down.

Amy Wallen is the author of "MoonPies and Movie Stars: A Novel" and teaches creative writing at UC San Diego Extension.

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

[Article licensing and reprint options](#)