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Single mom Natasha Dávila has done a good job holding things together. Her divorce didn't leave her with much, but she has her kids and they are her world. Only now, she's facing a problem she never predicted: Her ex-husband is re-marrying, expecting a new baby and --worst of all--suing Natasha for full custody of their two children. Desperate to save her family, she turns to her neighbors--fellow single moms facing their own drama. Sharing their laughter and their tears, these near strangers help Natasha find a strength she never knew she had. And when her ex ups the ante and exposes some disturbing news about Natasha's new friends, she'll need that strength more than ever.

Better With You Here Details

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Author : Gwendolyn Zepeda

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From Reader Review Better With You Here for online ebook

Katya says

This was my third book by Gwendolyn Zepeda, my first novel by her. I had previously read *Falling in Love with Fellow Prisoners* and *Monsters, Zombies and Addicts: Poems* - both excellent books of poetry.

Better with You Here follows the life of Natasha, nary a year removed from divorce, and struggling with the fallout. She has primary custody of her two grade school children, and like with most newly single parents, she is finding out how to navigate being mom, making new friends, and dating a new man, all while dealing with her ex-husband, who is on a mission to take over primary custody of their kids. There's nothing sugar-coated about Natasha's experiences, and nothing overly gritty and contrived either. Natasha is a real woman with real world issues, and Zepeda does a great job of making her relatable.

Besides being a story about a single mom, this is a story about friendship, and about what that means in terms of standards set, secrets allowed and support given. I really appreciated the way Zepeda wrote this part of the story. It actually made me think about my own approach to friendship, and that kind of examination after reading a book is always a good thing.

Better with You Here is a page turner. It would be a great book to take to the beach. I enjoyed the writing style. I cared a lot about the characters. And, most of all, I was emotionally wrapped up in the outcome. Win, win...and win.

Carol says

I found this book to be all over the place. What was the main point? Her divorce? Her kids? Her friends? I felt it brought in too many unnecessary characters that served no purpose - too many children brought in. I felt it was very disorganized.....I really wanted to like it.

Sonya says

I kept reading this book, hoping it would get better, mostly because I have to finish reading what I've started. Plus, it is set in the Dallas area, and, having spent a large portion of my life there, I enjoyed connecting with the references to that area. However, the preponderance of anger and angst was soul-sucking. I get it is dealing with the difficult subject of divorce. But the constant hatred the main character felt toward her ex-spouse was ridiculous, especially considering she left him. I've known couples who divorced due to unfaithfulness, abuse, etc, who harbored less ill will. Plus, the secrets Zepeda built up for characters, when revealed, became a disappointing letdown. Too much hype to build them up, without the reward of them being worth it. I don't often sell back books I buy, but this one's headed to Half Price, in hopes that the meager cash offering will provide for a more enjoyable read.

Jessica says

In Gwendolyn Zepeda's *Better with You Here* (Grand Central Publishing), single mother Natasha Davila can't catch a break.

In the opening chapter, she's competing with her ex-husband's new girlfriend and dealing her son's damp underwear.

"Fifty percent of my job as a mother is cleaning up bodily fluids... And then the other 50 percent is worrying," she says.

Just when Natasha is getting some good luck – finding a decent babysitter and making friends with two other women in her Dallas apartment complex – her ex-husband demands full custody of their children, Alex and Lucia.

Better is a great read thanks to a fast-paced plot with a few interesting twists. But it's strength lies in Natasha's voice. She speaks matter-of-factly when she's recounting her woes, not feeling sorry for herself. When she's angry, she's on fire and Zepeda's words just flow.

Zepeda is also terrific at describing the little things – such as the way the women struggle to make ends meet. In one scene, Natasha reveals her biggest loss since her divorce.

"That's what I miss most about being married – my washer and dryer."

Two other narrators are featured in the book – her 8-year-old son Alex and her friend Sara. Sara's voice shows her smart-ass attitude ("I can't stand church. It's too damn boring."), but a few of her lines are confusing and annoying.

Still, that's one of the few weaknesses in this compelling book. *Better with You Here* makes a great summer read.

Notes: This originally appeared on my blog, The Hispanic Reader. (<http://hispanicreader.com>)
I received a review copy from the publisher.

Penny says

Single mom Natasha Dávila has done a good job holding things together. Her divorce didn't leave her with much, but she has her kids and they are her world. Only now, she's facing a problem she never predicted: Her ex-husband is re-marrying, expecting a new baby and --worst of all--suing Natasha for full custody of their two children. Desperate to save her family, she turns to her neighbors--fellow single moms facing their own drama. Sharing their laughter and their tears, these near strangers help Natasha find a strength she never knew she had. And when her ex ups the ante and exposes some disturbing news about Natasha's new friends, she'll need that strength more than ever.

Linda Doyle says

The cover and title of this book are misleading. I expected a light chick-lit read about single mothers who form supportive friendships over coffee klatches. The story deals with a harsher reality. Natasha is a single mom who is doing her best to raise her two children, and then her irritating ex sues for full custody. The book takes an unexpected turn at that point. A secondary character, Sara, assumes the narrative role intermittently, which I found confusing. I think it is an unnecessary plot device that could have been more deftly handled.

The villain is Natasha's ex-husband who never comes off as a real person. As seen through the eyes of Natasha, he is a loud-mouthed, insensitive bully without any redeeming qualities. On the plus side, the character of Sara, Natasha's friend, has depth and is likable despite her rough manners. The children are also well written. One scene where Natasha and her ex argue while at a mediation session is unpleasantly real.

All around, this is a good story, but deeper character development and a smoother narrative style would have made it stronger.

Lisa says

I've been reading Gwendolyn Zepeda for years. But it's all been online--I've followed her various blog incarnations for over a decade now. To be honest, I was afraid to read one of her books. What if I didn't like it? Would it change the way I felt about her online persona?

But I screwed up my courage and pre-ordered *Better With You Here*, and I'm so glad I did! I enjoyed it immensely! I read it in two days flat...I couldn't put it down!

The main characters and their experiences felt very real and relatable and I rooted for all of them. I think that's why I couldn't put the book down. I had to know if they were going to get their happy endings!

I particularly appreciated the parts of the novel written from Natasha's son's point of view. We adults aren't the only ones with worries and complicated inner lives. I think some adults forget that.

I can't wait to see what Gwen writes next. And now I can go back and read her earlier works with confidence!

A.K. Klemm says

Zepeda writes Texas pretty darn well. Apparently she's from Houston, like myself, and the story is set in an area of Dallas that I lived in while I was in college. Oak Cliff is very real. I agree with previous reviewers that this cover is misleading and insinuates this book will be cozy. It is not. It is very real, harsh, and un-cozy - and pretty much never involves coffee or tea! But the story is one a lot of people can relate to and she handles utilizing different voices well... although the narrative switches up, you can always tell who is talking. It reminded me of an urban Barbara Kingsolver (author of *The Poisonwood Bible*).

Rachel Kramer Bussel says

I tore through this book, told from the points of view of Natasha, the main character, a single mom of two

struggling to raise her two kids and adjust to life in her new apartment complex, her son, Alex (her daughter, Lucia, is presumably too young to get her own chapters), and her new friend, Sara. Mainly, it's Natasha's voice Zepeda shares with us, as she tries her best to not be bitter about the breakup of her marriage, not fight with her ex, do her best for her kids and occasionally get it on. When she meets Geronima, an elderly woman who has custody of her granddaughter and is the unofficial babysitter of the apartment complex, she starts to make friends with Sara and Haley, both also single moms, and open up a little. Meanwhile, her ex tries to get custody, and the battle turns particularly nasty. Alex is into superheroes and playing "spies," and in doing so, shows us just how much little kids pick up on. His chapters are adorable and sometimes heartbreaking, and while sometimes the juxtaposition of adult to child is jarring, his were among my favorites, as he is highly perceptive for his age, and Zepeda uses his perspective excellently. This is a page turner, not because it's a mystery, though there is plenty of drama, but because the characters are outspoken, opinionated, stubborn and real. This is "chick lit" for grownups, and looks at how far women will go to support their children, what it means to be a good parent, and how family is often made up of those we choose, rather than those we are thrown together with. I loved these characters and would gladly keep reading about them (one can only hope Zepeda will write a sequel).

Smudgedink7 says

This is a book I will remember for some time. It's not glossy or gritty it's a true depiction of real life without being trite. I sympathized with the characters and I was happy when they triumphed. The writer had a knack with the dialogue which several times left a smile on my face. I would recommend it to my friends.

Julia Amante says

As with Gwendolyn Zepeda's previous books, I love that she brings her character to life with rich, real details. You feel like you know the main characters. This time she had a second person POV for one of the characters which was interesting and not seen or done often. Great story about being a divorced mother and all the issues that come up with trying to parent alone. Really enjoyed it.

Melissa Nestor says

It took me a while to read this book and I'm still trying to figure out why. Usually a book that is this short in pages would only take me about a week to read. Maybe it was because I am busier lately or maybe it's because I wasn't motivated to read more than a chapter or two at a time because the story wasn't grabbing me. Don't get me wrong, it was written very well, it had an original storyline, and the chapters were short enough to finish one on the fly, but there wasn't anything that made me want to immediately flip to the next chapter because I had to find out what happened. It was a good book with a good ending and all in all, I am glad that I read it. I would recommend for someone to read this casually or as a "beach read."

CJ says

Full disclosure: I've been reading Gwen's writing for many years and have been overjoyed when she moved from blogging, to newspaper columns, to published novels. She is snappy and smart and if we lived in the same state, we'd totally be knitting buddies.

Better With You Here has several different narrators - each with a clearly different voice (my favorite was young Alex). Zapeda has an ear for dialogue that really rang true with me. I know people like her characters. Natasha's struggles were a little too close to home for my own comfort.

The greatest compliment I can give a novel is to say, "I know it's not real - but it could be". There are many women living with the same conflicts that Natasha and her friends have. Sometimes you just have to make the best choice among the choices you have and hope it works out okay.

Kath says

The story started out pretty good but as each chapter went on, it went downhill till the very end. I should have quit this book at least halfway through but I had hope that it might improve.... It didn't. Boring story and I didn't get who Sara was talking to in the chapters that were the ones where she was having a conversation with "someone"... It was kind of a silly way to try to make it appear "mysterious" but it wasn't, it was confusing.

So all in all, not something I would recommend.

Kim says

One star for the book cover and the other for the story.
