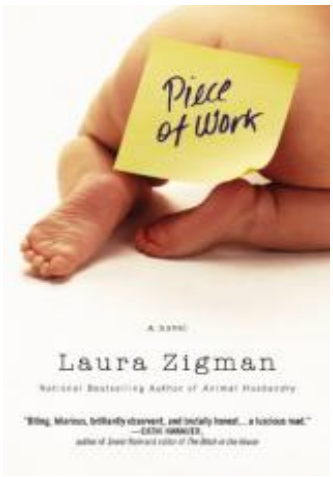
Piece of Work

by Laura Zigman



About the Book

Julia Einstein never wanted to return to her high-stress job of celebrity publicist. But when her husband loses his job, she has no choice but to reenter the world of monstrous egos, imperfect illusions, and 24-hour spin --- a world she thought she had left behind forever when she had a baby three years ago and moved to the suburbs.

Stranded now at a third-rate publicity firm in New York City that specializes in resuscitating the careers of "Has Beens," Julia's first assignment is to promote the launch of a perfume: a scent created to engineer the comeback of 73-year-old former screen goddess Mary Ford.

In the unpredictable Mary, Julia gets much more than she bargained for. And when she is forced to go on the road with the former diva to promote her failing product, Julia finds herself tested to the very brink of human endurance by: her mercurial, abusive charge; her pompous and infinitely devious boss; by keen bouts of homesickness; by angry PETA activists; and by PR disasters and a perfume that, well, stinks.

For every woman who has ever confronted the hard choices of work and family, and lived to tell the tale, and for every woman who has overcome seemingly insurmountable odds (not to mention losing those last 10 pounds!), this is a novel as touching and hilarious as they come. Brimming with comic moments, sharply witty observations and unexpected poignancy, this is vintage Zigman at her very best.

Discussion Guide

1. If you're a working mother tell the group about what it was like for you to return to work. How old were your children? If you're a stay-at-home mother, talk about your decision not to work outside the home. Do you mind the "SAHM" and "WOM" labels of do you think they're devisive?

2. Often times, when a stay-at-home mother is asked what she does, she'll say: "Nothing. I'm just a mom." Talk about the idea that society in general and women in particular devalue probably the most important job in the world.

3. There's been a lot written lately about "The Mommy Wars" - conflicts between SAHMs and WOMs. Do you think The Mommy Wars exist? Or do you think it's an invented syndrome created to generate headlines and sell books?

4. Working for bad bosses is a popular topic these days. Why do you think people agree to work for bosses who have terrible reputations? Is it because they think they'll acquire power and fame simply by association? Or because they need to prove to themselves that, like extreme athletes who climb Mt. Everest, they can do it?

5. Describe the worst boss you ever worked for.

6. Why do you think people are so fascinated with fame and celebrity and obsessed with famous people and celebrities? Do you think the culture has changed in the last 30 years? 50 years?

7. As Julie starts spending less time at home and more time at work she starts getting jealous of Peter's homemaking skills and his friendships with mothers at the preschool. Can you relate or would you rather be at work than at home?

8. What do you think about stay-at-home-dads (SAHDs). Honestly. Do you think men can be "just as good" at mothering as women are or do you think no matter how evolved we become children still want their mother at home?

9. Is the clutter in Julia's house and her desire to "get organized" a metaphor for the fact the she feels her life is out of control? Are you as obsessed with the Container Store as Julia is? What is it about "getting organized" - or, more likely, the promise of getting organized -- that is so alluring?

10. If you've ever had a celebrity sighting or encounter describe it. Who is the celebrity - dead or alive - you'd most like to meet?

11. Many has-beens are mentioned throughout **Piece of Work**. Who is your favorite has-been?

12. The idea of Hasbeens making comebacks seems to prove the idea that success is relative - and that failure is relative, too. In a sense, both Julia and Peter are grappling with their own notions of feeling like has-beens. Have you ever felt like a has-been? When? Was your attempt at a "comeback" successful?

Author Bio

Laura Zigman is the author of SMALL WORLD (a *New York Times* Group Text pick and Editor?s Choice), SEPARATION ANXIETY, ANIMAL HUSBANDRY (which was made into the movie *Someone Like You*, starring Hugh Jackman and Ashley Judd), DATING BIG BIRD, HER PIECE OF WORK. She has collaborated on several works of fiction, including Eddie Izzard?s *New York Times* bestseller, BELIEVE ME; and has been a contributor to the *New York Times* and other publications. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her seventh and latest novel is THE AUTHOR WEEKEND.

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