

Nies, Judith

THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND: A Narrative History of the Sixties

Relating her transformation from naïve girl to empowered political woman, the author also paints a larger picture of the 1960s on Capitol Hill and beyond.

Bolstered by contemporary statistics and an excellent memory, Nies (Writing/Massachusetts College of Art; *Nine Women: Portraits from the American Radical Tradition*, 2002, etc.) details the life changes she experienced alongside countless other women during a decade of secrecy, boys'-club politics and outright lies. Although handpicked from her blue-collar background to attend the prestigious Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Nies quickly learned that secretary was about the highest title an educated American woman could attain in the '60s. She fought to carve out a space for herself in politics and international relations, relying on persistence, the support of the nascent women's movement and no small measure of guts. She gradually accomplished feats both personal and political, working with or against many famous, influential people along the way. In her punchy memoir, Nies demonstrates that equal rights for women in the workplace did not just happen, nor did they materialize as the result of benevolent male politicians finally deciding to do the right thing. Generations of female activists worked tirelessly behind the scenes to change the country's mind-set about women in the workplace and to raise awareness of crucial issues including child care, birth control and sexual harassment. Many of the dramatic trials and victories she records have faded from public consciousness, even though today's young women directly benefit from the efforts of their female forebears. The book's narrative style—blunt, unflinching, honest—serves the story well, and Nies refuses to gloss over her own flaws and errors. She ably details the conflicting demands made on and by women and their plural strategies for resolving them.

Both educational and entertaining, with a wry, ironic wit evident throughout. (*Agent: Betsy Amster/Betsy Amster Literary Enterprises*)