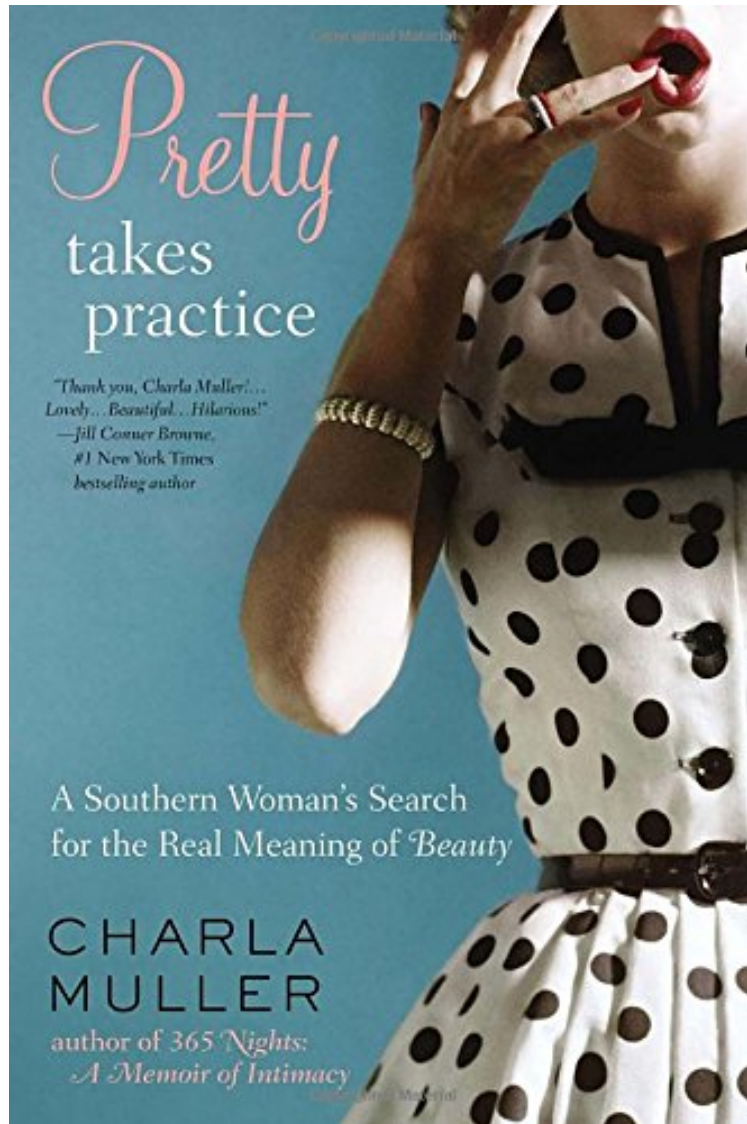


(Read free) *Pretty Takes Practice: A Southern Woman's Search for the Real Meaning of Beauty*

## **Pretty Takes Practice: A Southern Woman's Search for the Real Meaning of Beauty**

*Charla Muller*

*audiobook / \*ebooks / Download PDF / ePub / DOC*



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#999144 in Books 2014-08-05 2014-08-05 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.25 x .73 x 5.471, 1.00 #File Name: 0425266192272 pages | File size: 68.Mb

**Charla Muller : *Pretty Takes Practice: A Southern Woman's Search for the Real Meaning of Beauty*** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Pretty Takes Practice: A Southern Woman's Search for the Real Meaning of Beauty*:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. This book was so fun! I feel like Charla is my new best ...By BrittThis book was so fun! I feel like Charla is my new best friend! It was a reminder that we all (meaning ME) can

get very complacent about our looks-inside and out. I loved the message about being interested makes you interesting. As a mother of daughters, it made me conscious about the example I am setting about inward and outward "prettiness". My mother has been saying "pretty is as pretty does" to me for 42 years-and I have rolled my eyes almost every time. Uh oh-does this mean my mother was right?! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. And practice sometimes makes perfect! By SharonHmmm.... interesting perspectives on many unspoken practices that women battle in their heads and hearts all the time. I would recommend this book for you if you want to laugh, think of what "pretty" means to you and re-evaluate your pretty. I chose my 5 rating because I know all of this book to be true...the person who wrote it is as southern as sweet tea, as genuine as the southern hymns she sang in church, and as pretty inside and out as a firefly in a mason jar! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Women can Relate By Beverly B. Thompson We chose this book for our book club and it was entertaining because of Charla Miller's sense of humor. She took fluffy topics and added her own twist on them from her own experiences. We were also privileged to have Charla attend our Book Club and she was delightful. Sharing some serious moments as well as in-depth feelings from her past grabbed all of us into the conversation because we could relate so well as women. The part about her battle with MRSA was very interesting and educational, as I had never known much about that illness. It is a quick read and a great book to take with you on vacation.

Charla Muller's first book, *365 Nights*, was called "entertaining" (Albuquerque Journal), "surprising [and] remarkable" (The Independent [London]). It also launched her into the public eye—and brought her to a moment of painful realization . . . For an average working mom like Charla, going on a book tour was both intimidating and exciting. It also turned out to be horrifying: When she saw herself on a screen in glorious, unforgiving HD, it magnified all her flaws, prompted comments from unadoring fans, and forced her to reevaluate her (lack of) exercise regimen. But Charla was jolted into action and used that cringe-inducing close-up as a wakeup call. After shedding a few tears over how she'd let herself go (and over the five-year-old discount sweater she wore on Oprah), she set out on a strange, hilarious, and poignant journey that tapped into and tested her values, her beliefs about beauty, her self-image, and, of course, her relationship with her mother. In this lively, funny, moving account, a Southern woman shares stories she swore she'd never tell—and ultimately offers some unexpected and universal insight about how pretty takes practice.

"Thank you, Charla Muller...Lovely...Beautiful...Hilarious."—Jill Connor Browne, #1 New York Times bestselling author "[Muller's] journey is a confessional full of hard-won insight and good humor that all of us can relate to."—Celia Rivenbark, New York Times bestselling author of *You Don't Sweat Much for a Fat Girl* "The perfect guide to aging gracefully...An honest and engaging memoir."—Jordan Christy, author of *How to be a Hepburn in a Hilton World* "Unblinkingly honest and candid, this is a journey from pretty to frumpy to pretty again told in a strong, no-holds-barred manner."—Ronda Rich, bestselling author of *What Southern Women Know (That Every Woman Should)* About the Author Charla Muller worked in marketing and public relations in New York City before moving to her home state of North Carolina, where she works for a nonprofit. She lives in Charlotte with her husband, Brad, and their two children. She is also the author, with Betsy Thorpe, of *365 Nights: A Memoir of Intimacy*. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. RULE II have a vivid memory of my mother and a spectacular pair of sunglasses. They had black and white stripes and giant black lenses, and instead of an earpiece, there was a delicate chain that draped behind each ear, weighted down by a black-and-white disc that served double duty as . . . are you ready? An earring! Can you stand it? Eyewear as fashion accessory—eat your heart out, Foster Grant! It was 1973, and my mother looked fabulous. I was only six at the time, but I knew it. Or rather, I felt it, as if by instinct—a primal knowledge of sorts. My heart swelled with happiness as I snuggled up against her legs while she poked through the clothing racks at Connie's Tru-Fit Fashions on Merrimon Avenue in the heart of Asheville, North Carolina. My mother was pretty. I watched my mother thoughtfully sorting through those racks of polyester, cotton and wool-blend items—pulling out clothes, giving them an appraising look, draping possibilities over her left arm. I felt a sense of pride over a discovery that I couldn't quite articulate but certainly recognized in the way salespeople approached her. It was the same way policemen told her to drive safely as they let her off with just a warning and how my classmates reacted to her when she brought in cupcakes and choreographed class parties. I imagined myself my mother's age, shopping for fabulous outfits. Like her, my charm bracelet would jingle jangle as I juggled hangers of clothes and flitted around nicely appointed stores and boutiques. In our small mountain town in the seventies, keeping up appearances had become high art. What I didn't know then but would eventually discover was that there was much to learn when it came to the art of getting and feeling pretty. Fast-forward to when I was in junior high school and my mother and I were in a small dressing room at a different department store. This time, I was the one trying on clothes and schlepping down the hall outside the dressing room for a maternal once-over. My mother quietly studied me in the three-way mirror, her eyes scanning me from top to bottom and back up again. "You're high-hipped," my mother finally announced. It was a declarative statement, as if she were teaching a master class on the art of well-tailored clothing (instead of just me, standing in a dressing room hallway, wearing a pair of pants that pooled around my feet).

“You will always need to get your skirts hemmed correctly and your pants tapered just so.” She turned to confirm with the saleslady if the store alterationist was on hand. I had little understanding of and appreciation for this little nugget, nor any of the others she cast my way during my awkward adolescence. At the time, I just wanted to BE pretty and not have to fuss with any of the more cumbersome and time-consuming details. I didn’t want to admit that a lot of this pretty business took effort, especially when my first pretty memories were of my mother hosting glittery cocktail parties in an equally glittering one-piece pantsuit; or my mother lying by the pool in a bikini with a matching scarf tied around her hair and a cigarette in her hand; or my father’s face when it lit up with pride and adoration as he slipped his arm around her narrow waist and escorted her to a party at the club. My mother made it all look so easy. It wasn’t until I was an adult that, in a moment of profound retribution, I realized my mother was right about my hips, never mind all the other things. For instance, skirts often sat lopsided on me. A pair of pants (or “slacks,” as my mother liked to call them) didn’t “fall” quite right. Blazers bunched on my short-waisted frame. I worked to pluck my mother’s tutorials from the backseat of my memories in an effort to self-correct. That’s when I ended up meeting Marine Sergeant Marie. Marine Sergeant Marie was recommended by my friend Karen. The contrast between Karen and me is stark. She is nearly six feet tall and model thin. I am nearly five foot three and not. But the one thing we DID have in common is that neither of us dressed “off the rack” with great success, creating a pressing need for a high-quality dependable alterationist. “I’d be happy to pass along my alteration lady’s contact information,” Karen shared one afternoon after a girls’ birthday luncheon. We were chatting about spring wardrobe essentials and lamenting about the need for alterations. “But be warned. She’s kind of brutal and to the point. And she’s not cheap.” I took down Marine Sergeant Marie’s number, confirmed her address and loaded my big honkin’ SUV with clothes for my lunchtime appointment. She opened the door, and efficiently showed me into the bedroom-turned-sewing studio. She hung my clothes on a rack in her narrow hallway and sent me to her guest bathroom to get changed. Marie was a trim, attractive, single sixty-something with white-blond hair cut short. She spent the first ten minutes circling, assessing and clucking under her breath. It was as if I were in a time machine that took me back three decades and I was standing there with my mother. “Well, let me get a look at you,” she said, finally stopping to stand behind me, looking at me in the mirror that ran the length of her workroom. That’s right, a mirror as big as an entire wall. While she stood behind me and we studied my reflection together, my palms started to sweat. Maybe the Asian ladies who spoke nada English and hemmed everything too short weren’t all that bad, I thought to myself. They never made me pit out. “Head up! Shoulders back,” she barked. “You’re too short to slouch. Don’t stand with your knees locked, for God’s sake, give your body some form.” She was right, but it was as if she was channeling my mother, my grandmother AND Joan Crawford (but without the hangers). “What do you see when you look in the mirror?” she asked. That was a trick question, I was sure of it. Marine Sergeant Marie was going to make me do a hundred burpees if I didn’t get this right. But I was stumped, so I just stood there. “Quit acting like you want to disappear. Stand up and own the room.” What she didn’t know was that I did want to disappear. It was sensory overload—the mirror that allowed for no escape. Her sharp orders and firm instructions. For Pete’s sake, I just needed her to fix my clothes; I had no idea she would try to fix me. But she kept tugging, pulling, pinning and lecturing. And then she started tucking and hemming and nipping, and sure enough, ill-fitting clothes started to take shape. Along the way, I picked up a tip or two, adding to and rounding out my mother’s early instruction. Apparently lifelong learning doesn’t apply just to one’s career. It applies to getting pretty, too. Years before Karen shared Marine Sergeant Marie with me and her need for fashion help, I was slightly stunned to discover that even the genetically blessed have to work to maintain the pretty—it’s not just a happy accident. My college roommate was Malibu Barbie by way of Long Island. Really, she was (and still is) that pretty—pale blue eyes, a gorgeous smile with white teeth as straight as a picket fence and blond hair so thick that a ponytail holder would barely wrap around it twice. The only way to improve on her tanned and beachy good looks would be a tanned, beachy and equally handsome boyfriend. Enter stage left, handsome-surfer-boy-actor, whom she later married. (Yes, their children are genetically gifted, too.) Our senior year in college we were sitting around the sorority house, sporting baggy gym shorts and oversize fraternity T-shirts that boasted our popularity (or not), waxing poetic about some lame beauty conundrum—because, really, what beauty conundrum can you possibly have when you’re twenty-one, blonde, tan and gorgeous (her, not me)? That’s when my roommate, Susan, the beach goddess, announced, “Just remember, girls, after the age of eighteen, there’s no such thing as a natural blonde.” I think time skipped a second. I mean, I knew what girls like ME had to contend with (Jolene cream bleach and no hip-hugger jeans, for example), but I can honestly say that it never had occurred to me that even the preternaturally pretty had to manage their pretty, too. Ever since then, I’ve been a bit more sympathetic to my gorgeous sisters, trying to remember that we all have our various pretty priorities. Highlighting tresses to recall the sun-kissed color of youth. Monthly facial appointments in a quest for peachy-soft skin. Can’t-miss dates with a personal trainer for a well-rounded booty. We’re all force-ranking our beauty priorities based on our pretty preferences and the age-old truism that there is not enough time in the day to do it all. From the day we are born (“the baby looks like me!”) until the day we die (“she looks so peaceful”), people are judged on their looks. You do it. I do it. We all do it. We notice things, we assess things and we draw conclusions from these things. Or as my grandmother might say, “She didn’t spend much time getting pretty today, now, did she?” And often these things do take time, don’t they? This is why one day my friend

Kim arrived late to our bridge lesson. She took her seat at the square card table in the corner room of the Bridge Center, a former rec center-turned-card-playing safe house for bridge newbies and veterans. About a dozen women from thirty-five to fifty-five were crowded in the room, intent on learning nuances like no-trump interference bidding. “Sorry,” she whispered as she picked up her cards. “I was getting dressed for my annual. It’s later today.” My two girlfriends and I nodded and murmured conspiratorially in agreement and then counted our high-card points. Kim got a late pass that day—after all, annual physicals are like first dates and job interviews. They require time and focus. There’s no question I treat my annual exam like Date Night with my husband—the only difference is that one includes a speculum. First, I shower and shave—I shave everything that might need shaving, and even those parts that don’t, just for good measure. Remember that preschool ditty “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes, Knees and Toes”? That’s me with a razor. I’m shaving, looking, peering for anything weird or gross—as if my doctor has some delicate sensibility and might be grossed out by that mole, or that hair sprouting out of a mole. I loofah. I wash my hair, I condition my hair. Then I give my hair a nice long blowout. I put lotion all over, taking special care with my elbows and knees. My doc (who’s a woman, mind you) doesn’t care about my underwear. In fact, she doesn’t even see my underwear—I’ll be in a chilly little paper gown that’s been wrinkled and shredded in my attempt to put it on the right way (it opens in the back, doesn’t it?). But my underwear should be clean and fairly new anyway, right? God forbid I end up in a terrible accident on the way to the doctor and some ER nurse whom I know from my child’s school might have to cut off my clothes and would instantly judge my skuzzy granny panties and not only deny me care, but also my rightful place on the PTA board next year. However, if I wear my new, personally-fitted-by-a-licensed-bra-fitter Wacoal Bra in a subtle neutral, the nurse would not only decide NOT to cut that high-quality, hand-washed undergarment from my body while I lay in the ER in need of a right lung, but also decide unequivocally that I should be PTA president (which I don’t want to be, by the way). Really. Lastly, I do my full makeup routine and put on nice jewelry for my doctor. I don’t do perfume, though. Don’t want her to think I’m trying too hard. I want to look nice for my doctor. Healthy. Glowing. Youthful. Un-sick. I want her to see that I’m taking good care of myself, despite my overconsumption of wine on Saturday night and my overconsumption of the Red Velvet Pancake special at the IHOP on Sunday morning. I want her to compliment my cholesterol levels and approve of my exercise regimen and be blown away by my fabulous blood pressure. All told, I want my doctor to approve. As if her acknowledgment of my efforts to look good will negate all the things I’m NOT doing right. The irony, of course, is that the time I took to get ready to see my doctor exceeded the time spent with my doctor by twofold. But that is irrelevant, because my goal is to look as great as this forty-something, full-time working mom of two on a part-time beauty budget can look these days. And let me tell you, at my last annual, I looked great! In fact, I hadn’t looked that nice during daytime hours in such a long time that I called up Brad. “Hey! I’m having my annual today and I look surprisingly great. Wanna meet me for lunch? I would hate for all this work to go to waste on Dr. Cole.” So we did. Carpe diem, I say. It’s important for my primary-care doctor to approve of me, because five years earlier my ob-gyn unceremoniously dumped me. It took her about, oh, all of seven minutes. “Charla, are you going to have any more babies?” she asked. I peered around the stirrups for a sight line of her small head that is cupped by a short, boyish bob. My ob-gyn was teeny tiny. I can’t believe she delivers babies without a stepladder. If they made stilt clogs, she would have them. I then stared at the ceiling, trying to think happy thoughts that weren’t in the shape of a huge, cold, curved piece of steel. “No,” I said with a tightly clenched jaw. “Two is the magic number at our house.” “Well then, have you considered an internist? I’ll bet you don’t have one. In fact, I’ll bet you’ve been using your annual ob-gyn appointment as a sub for a real physical for a long time.” Wow, a teeny, weeny psychic ob-gyn! “This will only pinch a bit.” She proceeded to go about her job. I winced and thought happy thoughts, this time about sipping a nice cold glass of Chardonnay while sitting on the porch of an oceanfront beach house and dealing out a hand of cards. “You know, an internist can give you a breast exam, a pap and a pelvic. Just like me. Plus, she can cover all the other stuff, too. After all, you’re nearing forty. It’s time you moved on.” Agh. She really is psychic. She knew EXACTLY where to apply the pressure. You’re old. It’s time to move on. Just like that, my ob-gyn put me out to pasture. After two beautiful C-sections, some seriously robust hemorrhoids, and a near bout with gestational diabetes, she moved me along to the Doctors for Aging Women Who Aren’t Having Any More Babies. The Internist. She didn’t hug me good-bye or give me a pat on the back or offer up a “Thanks for the memories, it was fun.” Clearly, she’s not from the South. Or else she would have sent me on my way with a casserole and a handwritten note on thick, pastel-pink monogrammed stationery that emphasized that it wasn’t my fault. It was her, not me. I have to admit, I was crushed. I opened my heart and my uterus to this woman for SIX YEARS, offered up puffy ankles and my very reasonable co-pay, stayed proudly stoic during my sixty-pound weight gain and emergency C-section. And all I got was this. At the time I feared what seeing an internist meant for the bigger picture. You do know that internists are the “gateway” docs, don’t you? They come with a stable of specialty docs—an allergist, a gastroenterologist, a mammographer, an ophthalmologist (Don’t need reading glasses just yet? Just wait). The list goes on and on. And do you know how much time is required to look nice and well groomed for that many specialists? Tripling my medical appointments would start to take its toll. This old car had some mileage on it and the maintenance was about to kill me. Something would have to give in order to better manage my time. So for me it was ironing, which was just fine with me. I hate ironing. I try desperately to avoid it. I work very hard NOT to iron. Brad

dry-cleans his clothes. His overserviced Brooks Brothers shirts eventually disintegrate and poof—they literally disappear in a cloud of starchy white cotton. Then I buy him more. I try to fold the kids' clothes right from the dryer to minimize wrinkles. When they were younger, I had their smocked dresses and john-johns as well as their Strasburg frocks professionally cleaned. And now my kids have nifty dry-weave golf shirts and no-iron button-downs. Which annoys my mother, who thinks somehow I am cheating. And when it comes to me, I try to buy clothes that don't need to be ironed. I have five knit dresses from one of my favorite women's stores—same style, same size, five different patterns. They. Are. Awesome. Honestly, it can be freeing to have a uniform. Kim, my bridge pal, smart and successful business owner and mom of three fabulously well-turned-out daughters, has her own uniform: she wears gorgeous linen tunics that make her look perpetually backlit—all soft and flowy, yet crisp and clean. She always looks thoughtfully pulled together. At one time I aspired to look soft and flowy, yet crisp and clean with a fabulous linen dress from Neiman's—it was a spectacular melon color. Like a good girl, I got it dry-cleaned and pressed every spring. And every season, I put on the dress and took it right off. Put it on and took it right off. I couldn't figure out where to wear it and not end up looking like a piece of wadded-up, coral-colored tissue paper. This dress would be perfect if I didn't have to drive anywhere, sit down anywhere or do anything. Ergo, this beautiful, melon-colored linen dress had no business in my closet and no role in my life. So out with the linen and in with the fabulous, wear-anywhere, stretchy-yet-very-chic shirtdress that I can dial up or down, wear nearly year-round, roll up in a ball and shove in my carry-on luggage, hand-wash and line-dry, wear with a cardigan, dress up with pearls and NEVER, EVER HAVE TO IRON. It's a magic dress, friends. You should get one. Or five.