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Always in a rush? Local woman wrote just the book for you

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It's not you.

If you find you are always rushing, whether you need to or not, if you face too many demands without enough time, if you seem to be "skidding across the surface of life" from task to task with no room for satisfaction or meaning, know there's hope — because it's our life-in-overdrive culture that's the problem, not you.

That's the message of first-time author Abby Seixas, a Weston psychotherapist whose philosophy is being touted in national magazines and resonating with local women who are forming groups based on her book's straightforward suggestions.

After spending 20 years coaching women on how to slow down, Seixas recently distilled her methods into the user-friendly guide "Finding the Deep River Within: A Woman's Guide to Recovering Balance & Meaning in Everyday Life" (Jossey-Bass/Wiley 2006). Both her private life and her work led her to focus on the subject.

"When I had kids, somehow it was so consuming and intense — the caretaking, and balancing that with having a home and working and trying to keep all the basic life chores running — that I felt like a piece of my life was missing," said Seixas, 56, whose two children are now grown.

"At the same time, I was seeing this escalation in my private practice in psychotherapy around this," she added. "The overscheduled life was becoming a therapeutic issue. People were bringing it in more and more into my consultation room."



JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Abby Seixas in her study. Her book, "Finding the Deep River Within," has drawn rave reviews.

Beyond the quality-of-life issues, there was more cause for concern. As Seixas notes in her book, health problems, ranging from migraines and heart disease to mental illness and substance abuse, have been linked to the stressful lifestyle that she says passes for normal these days.

Meanwhile, our culture of constant interruptions — cellphones, call waiting, instant messaging — and multitasking induce other symptoms.

One 2003 Carnegie Mellon study Seixas cites showed that juggling too many tasks at once can actually set off prolonged adrenaline rushes that can damage the brain cells responsible for processing short-term memory.

"I think this is just an incredibly important and epidemic issue — the issue of too much to do and not enough time," she said. "People are out of control and suffering in their lives."

So Seixas went into action. Drawing on psychotherapeutic concepts as well as relaxation and meditation techniques she'd practiced herself for years, she started Deep River women's workshops in 1994. Men also suffer from what she calls "the disease of 1,000 things to do," but because of the "supermom" syndrome, she chose to focus on women.

In the seven-week seminars she holds in Weston and Concord, women gather to practice ways to find their own "deep river," the in-

ner peace of knowing "who I am and what matters to me."

Getting there can be as mundane as jogging to clear your mind; as simple as doing nothing else and paying attention while you eat or as profound as meditating one's way into a state of deep consciousness where "the inner world and the universal intersect."

Seixas acknowledged that many of her recommendations are not new. But the way she presents them in her book is garnering rave reviews and high-profile recognition. Despite being a first-time author, Seixas had her pick of two publishers.

As the book hit the shelves last

Always in a rush? This book's for you

The tyranny of to-do lists

Excerpt from "Finding the Deep River Within: A Woman's Guide to Recovering Balance & Meaning in Everyday Life," by Abby Seixas.

List consciousness is a state of mind that is entirely future-oriented. With a subtle but constant quality of rushing, it operates on the premise that life will happen once everything is crossed off the List. . . . When I am in list consciousness, it is as if I am out in front of myself or ahead of myself. I am leaning into the future and, in the process, completely missing the present.

Practicing presence is training in releasing ourselves from

this mind-state. It punctures the fantasy that somehow life will begin when the kids' soccer season is over or when I lose ten pounds or when I get over this cold or even when I take that meditation course and learn how to be more present! Practicing presence is bringing ourselves to the recognition that life is happening right *now* — and is inviting us to wake up and notice.

Seixas reads from her book tonight at 7 at Bacon Free Library, 58 Eliot St., Natick. Call 508-653-6730. Admission is free. For more Greater Boston events, visit deepriverwithin.com.

month, it was being excerpted in the September issue of Oprah Winfrey's O magazine and gushingly reviewed in Martha Stewart's Body + Soul. TV, radio, and at least one nationally syndicated columnist already are calling.

Meanwhile, the jacket endorsement by Dr. Christine Northrup, author of "Mother-Daughter Wisdom," went so far as to say the book "holds the key to lasting health and sustainable joy."

Publishers Weekly wrote: "Seixas' accessible prose and the slow, lasting journey she advocates are welcome in light of the many self-help books that teach us to snatch moments of rest while still keeping on the go, go, go."

In other words, Seixas offers no quick fix or hollow slogans. Rather, she delivers carefully considered, gently explained, and tested tools for simplifying life via small but meaningful steps.

Seixas says the local women enrolled in her workshops helped her refine every tip and even provided a few of their own. Their stories, told with changed names in the book, provide example after easy-to-relate-to example of how

these women used Seixas's ideas.

"Without them to try everything out, there would be nothing," she said.

The feelings of gratitude are mutual. Brenda Asis of Weston said in an interview that Seixas's workshops changed her life, helping her through a crisis and a career change. She posted her story on Seixas's website (deepriverwithin.com).

"I'm sort of a type A, very driven, outgoing person who never thought I could sit down and meditate, but I found out this is not just for quiet types. In fact, I think people like me need it most of all," said Asis, 52, a mother of two and development director of a non-profit organization. "I still don't meditate much, but Abby gave me other tools to use. . . . It's given me myself back."

Andrea Kozol of Sudbury, a mother of two who runs her own business, echoed those sentiments: "The way she presents the topic, it's really simple and it's really easy. So you feel like you have the ability to carve out meaning in your life without having to run off to a Tibetan monastery."

Kozol found the support of the other women in the group was significant as well, which was one of Seixas's goals.

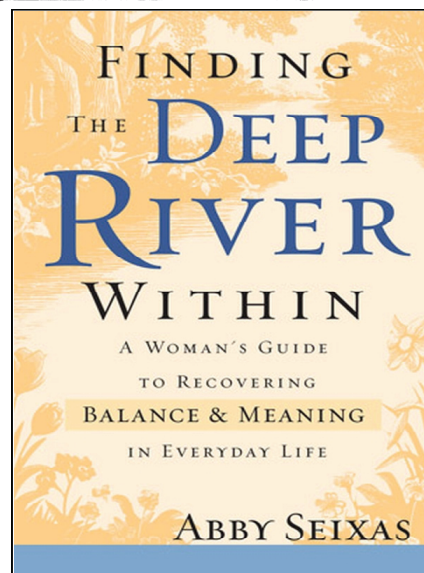
"I'm really hoping this will spread through the grass roots, that women will form groups with friends and work through the book together," said Seixas.

Sara Hunter of Weston is doing just that. A Deep River grad and author herself, Hunter urged a reluctant Seixas to write the book. Now that it's out, Hunter is reading it with her MetroWest book group.

"With 15 of us in the group, I'm sure the discussion of the book is going to fly by and be very animated," said Hunter. "So, I wouldn't be surprised if it develops into something more than that, like an off-shoot group."

Hunter also said Seixas's book stands out from the self-help fray because "it's not a selfish thing. When we slow down, it's better for everybody."

"This isn't just about women stopping to take time for a bubble bath," said Seixas. "When we are out of touch with ourselves, the consequences ripple outward. Slowing down culturally has implications for our kids, our planet, and our future."



For more information:
www.deepriverwithin.com