



# I Know Just What You Mean: The Power of Friendship in Women's Lives (New York)

By Ellen Goodman, Patricia O'Brien

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Pulitzer prize-winning columnist Ellen Goodman and novelist-journalist Patricia O'Brien provide a thoughtful, deeply personal look at the enduring bonds of friendship between women. Friends for twenty-seven years, they have served as confessors and advisers to each other during romantic, career, and child-raising crises, and have shopped together, laughed together, and enjoyed a bond unlike any other.

Drawing on interviews with numerous women, the authors take readers into the heart of "the place where women do the work of their lives, the growing, the understanding, the reflection," and illuminate both the fragility and strength of relationships that are irreplaceable lifelines.

*I KNOW JUST WHAT YOU MEAN WILL STRIKE A CHORD WITH WOMEN OF ALL AGES.*

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Sometimes timing is the difference between a friendship that lasts a lifetime and one that fades, but as everyone who has let a friendship lapse knows, it's also a matter of effort. A friendship is a lot like romance--in the beginning all chemistry and luck, but then come commitment and dependability and other words that don't scream "fun." And as any old friends know, it keeps getting better if you hold on through the bends and curves. After more than 25 years of friendship, Ellen Goodman and Patricia O'Brien share their own story, the stories of other women, and plenty of insight from psychologists and students of human nature in *I Know Just What You Mean*. The two recount their first acquaintance from separate perspectives and make it clear that neither felt a transcendent bond about to form. (No eyes meeting across a crowded room, no knowing nods exchanged: "Yes, I am a divorced mother and journalist, too. Let's talk.") And here they ask, "What is it, really, that friends do for each other?" Give advice? Listen and nod? Bring a covered dish? Sure, friends do these things, but above all, they know you in a way most people don't. Many readers will recognize Goodman's name from her syndicated column, O'Brien's from her novels and nonfiction. Aside from its merits as a piece of writing (Goodman and O'Brien live up to their mutually high standards), *I Know Just What You Mean* makes you think about your friends and friendships, past and present. And perhaps the best testament to what these two old friends have created is how much you want to pick up the phone and tell a friend about it. --Gwen Bloomsburg

#### From Publishers Weekly

In this warm, honest and engaging book, Pulitzer Prize-winning Boston Globe columnist Goodman (*Value Judgments*) and novelist O'Brien (*The Candidate's Wife*) use their 27-year friendship as a starting point for reflecting on the importance of women's camaraderie. Platonic friendship, they write, matters a great deal: "Women today--with lives often in transition--depend on friends more than ever." Starting with the moment they met (in their 30s), when they were both mid-career journalism fellows at Harvard, the authors take turns at the keyboard, telling their story. O'Brien, a Chicago-based mother of four, didn't graduate from college until she was 30; Goodman was a single mother and Radcliffe grad. The women remained crucial in each other's lives after returning to their respective careers and cities, and helped each other through career changes, parenting and remarriages. Beyond their own relationship, they examine those of other women: including Oprah Winfrey's friendship with Gayle King, Susan B. Anthony's with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the bonds between more ordinary folk (welfare mothers, college students, preschoolers). Along the way, Goodman and O'Brien discuss how women listen, talk, care for and empathize with their women friends--and how they compete with and betray one another (viz. Linda Tripp). The result is a skillful, unsentimental tribute to the strength of the authors' relationship. Heavy on insight and light on psychological jargon, this book is an intelligent, observant read--and sure to get a lot of attention in the coming months. Agent, Esther Newberg. 8-city tour.

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#### From Library Journal

Best friends for 25 years, Goodman and O'Brien use their own relationship to build this reflection on women's friendships generally, recalling the impact of men, work, babies, health, and feminism. The vignettes they record are often touching and offer more than occasional insight as the authors explore the importance and changing character of friendship. Readers will doubtless recognize the moments described between the authors--a popular columnist and a novelist, respectively--and the other pairs of friends they have interviewed, several of them women of note (Oprah Winfrey, Lesley Stahl, Mary Gordon, and Nina

Totenberg). The writing is plain (the phrase and the rest is history appears twice), and some readers will find the tone too often self-congratulatory. But many others will find this book appealing, and public libraries should expect requests.

---*Cynthia Harrison, George Washington Univ., Washington, DC*

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