

Author explores the high price of success

By Kate Seago

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Having it all — marriage, family, career — is only part of the challenge faced by successful women: They also have to learn to allow themselves to accept and enjoy it without guilt.

So says Nancy-Gay Rotstein, author of *Shattering Glass* (Farrar Straus Giroux, \$22), a new novel that explores the costs of success.

"Today we're measuring success by our achievements outside the home — but at the same time we're continuing, just like our mothers and grandmothers did, to believe we're failures when we have problems in our personal life," says Ms. Rotstein, 52.

"This kind of thinking — I call it the *Shattering Glass* phenome-

non — causes guilt, sabotages us, robs us of self-confidence and limits our potential for happiness.

"We often find that as women shatter glass ceilings to become successful in their careers, the complications that arise in our personal lives can shatter our happiness as well."

Ms. Rotstein, a Canadian, has herself combined several careers: She's an established poet, including the collections *Through the Eyes of a Woman*, *Taking Off* and *China: Shockwaves*. And she's active in Canadian arts and politics, a member of the Canada Council for the Arts, the National Library and Canadian Film Development Corp. (Telefilm); she holds a master's degree in history and a law degree.

The book is about "three wom-

en, their struggle to achieve independence, and what happens after they shatter the 'glass ceiling,'" Ms. Rotstein says. "It deals with all the things we weren't warned would happen."

"The need to write about these issues began when I went back to law school at the age of 39," she says. "I realized the most pressing and unresolved issue facing families today was how to successfully balance career and family."

Two of the characters are American and one is Canadian, which Ms. Rotstein says expresses "the universality of the book. This is women balancing career and family, and relationships with their children.

"If I'd only used one character, it would just be one interesting Please see ROTSTEIN on Page 12C.



John Reeves

Nancy-Gay Rotstein's novel, *Shattering Glass*, is about the downside to breaking the glass ceiling.

Rotstein drew from her careers

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woman's story. But I used three and put them in three different situations in order to really show the universality of the problem.

"They're all really in the same situation of juggling their families and the other things in their lives. This is really pretty much any woman's story today."

Ms. Rotstein thought she'd complete *Shattering Glass* in six months.

"I knew exactly what I wanted to say. But to have the emotional impact I wanted to have on the reader, every scene and every emotion a character felt needed to be realistic — and if not personally experienced, I went and researched it so I actually stepped into the shoes of each of my characters.

"Italy, for example, is an integral part of the end of the story, and to get the impact of the ending chapters, I went back to Italy and spent nearly two months there."

But the novel took seven years to finish, as Ms. Rotstein drew from her other careers, even flexing her clout as a child advocacy lawyer to gain access to normally closed facilities.

"I even went underground to experience how a mother would feel when she found her child in a juvenile detention center or halfway house."

Although *Shattering Glass* is not autobiographical, Ms. Rotstein says, she went back into her own life "when I [needed] specific emotional context."

She also experienced some of the issues faced by her three protagonists.

"I was a children's-rights advocate, but I was also a working mother of three children who went back to law school. I've struggled and lived with these tensions I write about. I felt this book had to be written, because I wanted to expose the realities and problems that families like mine . . . face today."

She cautions women to consider the ways they measure success and failure.

"We have to first identify this way of thinking within ourselves and ask what's going to make us happy ultimately, and to make sure we're realistic about what we ask of ourselves. I hope that the struggles of [main characters] Judy, Dede and Barbara can inspire us to break the cycle of guilt that can shatter happiness."