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**Neal Rubin**

## Author uses celebrities' keys to open life's secrets



The people in Linda Solomon's new book are used to having their pictures taken, and she is by trade a photographer, so many of them made the natural connection and asked when she would be coming by with a camera.

Actually, Solomon said, she wouldn't. The pearls and nuggets and anecdotes in "The Key: Celebrated People Unlock Their Secrets to Life" would be illustrated with black-and-white photos of keys.

That took some explaining. It still takes some explaining, in fact. But "The Key" (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, \$17.95) has arrived in a bookstore near you -- quite likely the only volume in the place to include words of wisdom from both Dolly Parton and Edsel Ford II -- and it works.

Solomon, who lives in a converted barn in Bloomfield Hills, tapped into friendships, her considerable Rolodex and understandable curiosity in amassing the 56 secrets to life that comprise much of the 136 pages.

Many of the people she heard back from, via phone, fax, e-mail or U.S. post, are not the sorts who readily respond to questions. As Tiger Woods' representative said when Solomon thanked her for making her day, "We don't get to hear that very often."

She'd asked Woods for the key to winning. "You get out of it what you put into it," he sent back. "If you don't put any effort into it, you won't get the results, but more importantly, you don't deserve them."

As for Solomon, much of her effort went into finding keys. Combing flea markets, antique stores and garage sales, and enlisting her husband, Barry, and various associates to do the same, she collected more than 5,000 specimens.

That was the easy part. Unearthing just the right key to pair with each passage took some time.

### Matching keys

Geraldine Ferraro, for instance, was the first woman on a major-party ticket for national office. Her key is an antique from the Yale & Towne Co. that's stamped, for some reason, FEMALE.

Edsel Ford II's illustration includes five Ford car keys of descending age, one for each generation of his family in the auto business, set against the cracked leather of an aging car seat.

The key to a legacy, he explained, "is to leave one." Like many of the entries, his inadvertently reads like poetry:

"My legacy is made manifest in my children,

"just as I carry my father's legacy

"and he carried his father's, and so on.

"If my children merely echo me,

"then I have failed.

"My purpose in life -- my legacy -- is to

"lift them to the next level."

He was an easy addition to the book, since Solomon counts him as a friend. Best known for her portraits of entertainers, Solomon was also able to enlist subjects-turned-buddies such as Tony Bennett, Kim Novak and Hilary Duff, the young singer and actress whose key to staying grounded begins with being assigned childhood chores.

Duff's key was basic. "True Value," it says. Model Christie Brinkley's was also immediately apt -- a key with a built-in watch face to go with the secret to a timeless look. (Brinkley's response: "No overhead lighting!")

Then there's Samuel L. Jackson, who is so cool that his character in the "Star Wars" movies is the only one with a purple light saber. His advice appears next to a jet black page with no illustration at all.


Tell me the key to being cool, Solomon said. To which Jackson tossed back:

"Not needing a key."

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