



I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales From a Happy Life Without Kids

Jen Kirkman

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales From a Happy Life Without Kids

Jen Kirkman

I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales From a Happy Life Without Kids Jen Kirkman
"You'll Change Your Mind."

That's what everyone says to Jen Kirkman—and countless women like her—when she confesses she doesn't plan to have children. But you know what? It's hard enough to be an adult. You have to dress yourself and pay bills and remember to buy birthday gifts. You have to drive and get annual physicals and tip for good service. Some adults take on the added burden of caring for a tiny human being with no language skills or bladder control. Parenthood can be very rewarding, but let's face it, so are margaritas at the adults-only pool.

Jen's stand-up routine includes lots of jokes about not having kids (and some about masturbation and Johnny Depp), after which complete strangers constantly approach her and ask, "But who will take care of you when you're old?" (*Servants!*) Some insist, "You'd be such a great mom!" (*Really? You know me so well!*)

Whether living rent-free in her childhood bedroom while trying to break into comedy (the best free birth control around, she says), or taking the stage at major clubs and joining a hit TV show—and along the way getting married, divorced, and attending excruciating afternoon birthday parties for her parent friends—Jen is completely happy and fulfilled by her decision not to procreate.

I Can Barely Take Care of Myself is a beacon of hilarious hope for anyone whose major life decisions have been questioned by friends, family, and strangers in a comedy club bathroom. And it should satisfy everyone who wonders if Jen will ever know true love without looking into the eyes of her child.

I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales From a Happy Life Without Kids Details

Date : Published April 16th 2013 by Simon & Schuster

ISBN : 9781451667004

Author : Jen Kirkman

Format : Hardcover 213 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Humor, Autobiography, Memoir, Comedy, Biography, Audiobook

 [Download I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales From a Happy Li ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales From a Happy ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales From a Happy Life Without Kids Jen Kirkman

From Reader Review I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales From a Happy Life Without Kids for online ebook

Ashley says

From my Cannonball Read V review...

Full disclosure: when I first heard about this book I got annoyed for two reasons. The first was jealousy – “Oh man why did she get to write this book? I so could have written this book. Damn it.” The second was annoyance at the title – saying “I Can Barely Take Care of Myself” seems to play right into the stereotypes so many of those with children have about us childfree folks. I can take care of myself just fine and I STILL don’t want children. But as the author so kindly reminded me herself on twitter when I made such a comment, you really shouldn’t judge a book by its title.

Well, I’m no longer annoyed by the fact that she wrote this book before I could – because is it GOOD. Ms. Kirkman (a writer for Chelsea Lately) did a much better job with this material than I could have done. The book feels honest, self-aware and not obnoxious. Of course I’m probably her target audience (happily committed to the childfree life) and I’m not sure what the Eileens of the world (Chapter 11 – man I’ve met many of them) will think of it. But screw that – who cares? It’s nice to read a book that doesn’t assume that every woman in her 30s without kids is just waiting to get pregnant.

I’m still annoyed at the title a bit to be honest, just because even though she spends a lot of time explaining why she really wouldn’t be the best parent, and even though this is (cringe) her truth, it’s still sort of frustrating that such an awesome book’s first impression is “No, you’re totally right, people who don’t want children are a little broken and just recognize that we aren’t as good at life as you parents are.” But that won’t keep me from recommending the content to all my friends (the ones with kids and the ones without).

The book gives us some of Ms. Kirkman’s background, although it doesn’t feel like a full-on memoir. I bought the book on Thursday and read about 40 pages. I wasn’t able to pick it up again until today (Sunday), and I basically read through the last 160 pages in one sitting. While the early chapters were interesting, she really gets into the meat of the different ways childfree folks find themselves in uncomfortable situations. So many people say (sometimes in the comments of articles Ms. Kirkman herself has written) ‘why do you non-reproducers feel the need to talk about your choice?’ We really, really don’t. But because (some, many, a lot of) people won’t accept no for an answer, we’re repeatedly ‘defending’ a position that is really only our (and our partner’s, if relevant) business. Sometimes it’s easier to just preemptively strike.

I don’t want to take away from the joy of any potential readers by spoiling too many of the great insights Ms. Kirkman shares, but here’s one of my favorites. She spends the better part of one chapter talking through this idea that having a child somehow makes someone selfless (the opposite of us selfish childfree folks) and this whole “I really didn’t know the meaning of life until I had a child” concept. I can’t do it justice here but she basically points out that all of these parents making those claims are essentially suggesting that they had no moral compass until they reproduced, which – huh. Interesting thing to admit. She also points out that many childfree folks are contributing to society in a selfless and meaningful way, such as contributing to charity and doing all sorts of things that people with young children may not have the time to do.

She also takes on such fun responses to “I’m not having children” as “But you’d be such a good mother!” and “It’s all worth it!” while addressing how amazingly insulting it is for some people to just assume they know someone better than they know themselves (the “you just think you don’t want kids” condescension). The liberties people take when they hear ‘no’ in response to ‘are you having children’ is mind-boggling, and Ms. Kirkman does a pretty great job in the Eileen chapter of pointing out how horrible and violated it can

make us childfree folks feel. We actually DON'T owe anyone an explanation, and yet somehow we always end up having to defend our choices to people at cocktail parties and weddings even if we really would rather be talking about literally anything else. We also really don't like being forced to essentially lie to try to make small talk easier for the person with the child who cannot understand

She does veer a little into a sort of 'huh' realm with what I think might be an ill-advised analogy in the last chapter but I do get what she's aiming for. And it doesn't take away from the rest of this well-written book. If you're interested in hearing her perspective before committing to buying the book, check her out on the April 18 episode of Citizen Radio – it's what convinced me that I really needed to read this book.

One last quote I'll be keeping in my back pocket in case I find myself facing boorish folks at a cocktail party thinking I just rolled out of bed at noon: "I get up at seven on weekends because I love my free time. Not every childfree person sleeps late and parties all the time. I am still a grown-up." Preach it.

Melissa Guimont says

This is a hilarious and spot-on account of how I feel about that dreaded question "So when are you going to have kids?" I'm glad to find someone else to relate to in this book. More than enough times my vacations have been spoiled, my sleep (in my own house!!) interrupted by the neighbor's kids, and my sanity has been tested with kids that are out of control. Some parents think it's funny while the non-kid friendly side of me wants to hit these parents over the head with their strollers and take away their ability to leave their house. The laugh out loud moment came when Jen told about her experience at the adult only pool which was teeming with rugrats. Nobody cared including the hotel security, but you would better believe it that they would care if, as she put it, she decided to "go into the kiddie pool and act like an adult and scream to my friend the best way to prevent a urinary tract infection after sex." Jen relays that she often feels like a monster based on the looks people give her when she replies that she doesn't want kids. I find it hard to bite my tongue when people that don't know me well enough tell me "how great a mom I would be." Obviously they only see me acting great around other people's kids because I have to. I don't mind kids and even like my friend's kids because I don't have to take care of them! If kids makes my friends happy, that's great for them, but don't expect me to want to pop out a bunch of heathens because it's a "maternal instinct" for all women. I have pets and plants thank you very much! Thanks Jen for making me feel like I'm not alone!

Robin says

e-galley provided on Edelweiss by Simon & Schuster

3.5 stars

Waaaay back when I started in the library biz (mid 70s), there was a book by Shirley Radl titled MOTHER'S DAY IS OVER that caused quite a stir among patrons and staff (it was based on the Ann Landers survey that resulted in 70% saying they wouldn't have kids again). I read it and while I won't say it influenced my final decision 8 years later, it did make me realize just what was involved with raising a kid and I seemed to know even then that I didn't have a maternal bone in my body. Flash forward 38 years later and I'm childfree and fairly pleased with my decision--well sure, there are those brief moments, but they are, well, very very brief...

I've never really talked about it and only once was I ever told it was "selfish" of me not to have kids so I

never felt I had to explain my decision; however, Jen Kirkman received so many mean-spirited comments that she had to constantly defend her decision, and that brought on some fairly strident and strong judgments from Jen. I did like the book but have to admit there were times Kirkman's humor got a little shrill and over the top, but then she does work as a comedy writer for Chelsea Handler whose humor I can only take in short doses.

This is a quick easy read for those who are thinking of not having kids or know they don't want any, and may find it somewhat validating. Those who like the books by Handler (ARE YOU THERE VODKA, IT'S ME CHELSEA and CHELSEA CHELSEA BANG BANG) will probably like Kirkman's somewhat crass humor and stories a little more than I did.

Darin says

I feel bad rating this book as I did. Because I like Jen Kirkman. A lot. I like her on Chelsea Lately. I liked her telling drunk stories. From how she presents herself and her views and musical interests I think we'd get on famously were we to ever drink together.

So I wanted to enjoy this book. I really wanted to. And I did for a bit. The first part of the book bumps along at a normal pace for memoirs, rehashing the early years with snarky realness. Then the book got to its point: Jen doesn't want kids. And 8 chapters later she still doesn't want kids. And the world really wants her to have kids and judges her for not wanting kids. And so on. While these never ending chapters have some funny anecdotes and lines, it gets so repetitious.

DISCLAIMER: I am a man. I'm in a fairly progressive social circle where some of my female friends have comfortably declared their lack of desire to reproduce. So I just may not have the experience to understand how relentless the pressure and judgment may be for a woman to produce kids. If you are a woman and don't want kids and have faced this issue through your adult years, you may very well love this book.

But for me, well I finished it. I hope that's enough.

Peter Derk says

Sorry, Jennifer.

I've found myself somewhat a fan of memoirs written by female comedians and comedy writers. Don't ask me why, it's just seemed to me that Tina Fey's was better than Mike Birbiglia's, and even though it wasn't all the way, deeply and sensually up my alley, Mindy Kaling's was a surprise hit for me as well.

This one didn't work for me. And I can tell you exactly why.

The premise (choosing not to have kids) and introductory chapter were pretty good. Funny, and also they had an actual topic, which is a big lack in a lot of comedy memoirs.

Then, however, we fell into the classic memoir trap: Let's go back WAY too far in time to when I was 20 and discuss how I wasted my time getting a worthless degree and hanging with college kids. I'm sorry, but this section was really unremarkable, and it seemed like it was written so that I was supposed to see the inherent humor in a girl moving in with two dudes as opposed to getting some good jokes in there.

Here's the difference between this book and books I've found funny: Funny books with funny writing get a good laugh out of me regardless of the situation. Maybe the situation is bizarre, and that can help. But it's the insight, the point of view the writer brings that takes something to the next level. Look at David Sedaris. If someone at a party said they were going to write an essay about learning French, I would nod politely and then politely excuse myself and then politely adjourn to the parking lot where I would politely douse myself and gasoline and burn myself to death. But, BUT, David Sedaris took the subject, not necessarily hilarious without some guidance, and highlighted what was truly funny.

This book felt like a lot of comedian books, which is basically their sets in written form with some stories about childhood in between. Really disappointing. I think this is a funny lady who can write a really funny book. And I'll be square, I read a small percentage of it. But hey, it's a memoir. I already know where the story ends, and I know that this book isn't about someone who had her face melted off or something. So I just need something more up top to keep me going.

Mander Pander says

About halfway through the book I lost count of how many times I thought "SHUT UP, JUST SHUT UP ALREADY." And it being an audiobook, this was both impossible and ironic.

You know what else is ironic? How many different ways she finds to attempt to lead the reader into believing that reproductive evangelists, babies seemingly permanently affixed to their nipples, are constantly tracking her down and trying to convert her to Team Breeder. Given how insecure and insufferable this woman is even to listen to on an audiobook, I'd find it easier to believe that the Mommy n Me groups of Greater LA banded together and funded a billboard saying **Jen Kirkman-- we hear you, and we agree. You should not have kids. Please board up your uterus.**

How is this woman a writer for a comedy show? She is not funny. You're not funny, Jen Kirkman.

Shannon Dale says

I saw Jen Kirkman's stand up comedy show on Netflix and loved it. So much of it related to my life. When I discovered that she had a book, I devoured it.

Well, I started off devouring it. And then it started to drag. And then I had to force myself to finish it.

She was just so...whiny.

I don't have kids by choice. I do recognize that it's still not the norm. When I announced at work that I had separated from my husband and divorce was likely, one of my coworkers turned to me and said, "but how will you have children?" When I told him that I didn't want kids, he didn't talk to me for a few weeks.

And that's it...in 36 years that is the most direct negative statement that anyone has said about my decision to not have kids. Maybe I'm hanging out with the wrong people. Now that I think of it, I would say that half of my close friends have chosen to remain childless. Out of the other half, maybe 2 will go on and on about how great kids are. The rest are very honest about how difficult it is to raise kids and have more than once expressed that they are envious of my freedom. Not a single one has tried to twist my arm and convince me to cave. Occasionally they try to tell me that I would be a terrific mother, but I think that's more for esteem

reasons and not because they think that I should procreate.

Perhaps I don't hate kids as much as Jen. I smile at toddlers. When I hang out with my cousin, her two youngest kids adore me. I really love throwing kids in the air. And running around with them. I would date a guy with kids if it was the right fit. My secret dream (now public dream) is to find a guy with grown kids so that I can be a grandmother someday without having done any of the work. I would be a kick ass grandmother.

So, I read this book thinking that I would relate to it. But it just annoyed me. Seriously, Jen. Don't let people bully you. And if you find yourself in these situations often...maybe you need new friends.

Lynette says

I absolutely loved this book. I'm childfree, and almost everything that Kirkman wrote about kids or parents could have been written by me. So many things she talked about mirror my own experiences and feelings.

My only issue is the title - I feel like the childfree women I know feel that they need to put themselves down as part of their defense. "I'd be a terrible mother", or "I'm too selfish." You know what? I'd be a great mother. I love kids, I'm great with them - I just don't WANT them. However, that's not a good enough reason for the people who think you should have kids, so women tend to find fault with themselves. It just bothers me.

Ashley says

Originally posted on yAdultReview

I grabbed this book on Netgalley cause of the title. I could say I'm joking but I'm not. I am a person who decided at a young age that I am going to be childfree. I don't like children. I didn't even like them when I was one. I am an eighty-year old who yells at children to get off her lawn in the body of a twenty-four year old.

Kirkman takes us on a tour of her life from when she was single and living back with her parents, to when she got married to a man who didn't want children, to the end when she was divorced but still not wanting children. It was nice to get that back story first to understand Kirkman and laugh with her throughout her trials and tribulations of growing up in New Jersey to working for Chelsea Lately.

This book didn't disappoint. Throughout the book, Jen Kirkman discusses fears of being childless I didn't even know I had until I read her thoughts. That being said, this book gets really repetitive quick, because really how much can you say about not wanting children? Hint: Not much. However, Kirkman's writing style and sense of humor shine and make this a worthwhile read.

Sahar says

I'm glad my friends are too disorganized/drunk to have kids.

Stina says

Book #12 for 2014

I remember back in the old days of the Web, Amazon was tinkering with its recommendations programming. Having determined that I was a female of childbearing age, it persisted in recommending to me nothing but Barney videos, Playskool toys, and books with titles like **Everybody Poops**. After several weeks of steadfastly declining any and all of these recommendations, Amazon finally got a clue. Just one, though, because it then started recommending I read nothing but lesbian erotica. I have nothing against readers of lesbian erotica, but I am not one (I don't even like straight erotica), and I resent the implications that a) the categories of "mommy" and "lesbian" are mutually exclusive, and b) these are the only two identifiable categories of female between the ages of 18 and 35. I probably don't have to tell you that I didn't buy anything from Amazon for quite some time.

I am finally old enough that people have quit telling me that I'll change my mind about having kids. They do still tell me I will regret it someday, though, and people who don't know me well simply assume that I already have kids. So the assumption that as a straight female I must of course need a child in order to be a whole and happy human being still rankles. Thus it should not surprise you that this title appealed to me.

This was amusing and hit on a lot of the things that bug the hell out of me about smug motherly types. Jen's voice put me in mind of Tina Fey's at times, but she was still a little lacking in the polish that comes with more life experience. I also thought Jen got a little rambling and repetitive at times. Still, it's nice that somebody with a sense of humor tackled this topic. I would recommend this to others who, like me, are child-free by choice and want a little validation. I might have given it four stars instead of just three if I felt like it would do any good to recommend this to somebody who doesn't understand our perspective and would gain insight from reading it. It's more of a preachin' to the choir kind of book.

Melisa says

This woman could have saved herself a lot of trouble if she would just get up some gumption and tell people "Children aren't for me" and cultivate her eat shit and die look.

It works for me.

Shannon says

Jen Kirkman is a stand-up comedian who decided early in life that she was not meant to be a mother. In *I Can Barely Take Care of Myself*, she explores the events in her life that led to and confirmed her beliefs in being childfree. With a witty, at times almost cringeworthy, voice Kirkman details her experiences choosing to forego motherhood in a very child-centric world.

When, in the the first handful of pages, Kirkman compared people badgering her over the need to have kids to them telling her why she needs to watch *The Wire*, I knew I was going to enjoy this book. Don't get me wrong; I love *The Wire*, but I didn't watch it until several years after it first aired. I totally know where she's

coming from...

In more ways than one. Though I do want kids eventually, I've been married for almost five years and my husband and I are still enjoying our time without children. I've been in many of the situations Kirkman describes in the book, despite my insistence that I do want to have a child, and her ability to make them humorous had me reading aloud to my husband more than once in gigglefits.

While it's definitely funny, writing I Can Barely Take Care of Myself off as the work of a snarky comedian lacking substance would be a mistake. Kirkman makes some really interesting social observations. What stood out strongest to me were her comments regarding the fact that women often feel forced to use their career as an excuse for not being mothers. I realized that I often mention work as a reason why my husband and I have decided to wait, when in reality it has very little to do with my career. So, why do I feel like I have to make excuses? As Kirkman mentions further, few people will let any other reason slide by. "As long as a woman has something she feels maternal toward, then she passes as a regular human being. She wants to swaddle her career, so we'll make an exception and give her a pass!"

Clearly, I am part of a target audience for this book that is rather limited. There are many that will be easily offended by Kirkman's honesty, just as they may be offended by her choice not to have children and this book will not be for them. However, for those who are considering not having children, waiting to have kids or just open to different viewpoints, I Can Barely Take Care of Myself is one you'll want to grab.

Gina Boyd says

I have a kid, and I love him madly, but I have never once tried to convince someone else to become a mother. Wait. That's not true. I tried to convince an aunt to have a baby when she first got married, but I was still a kid and didn't know any better. Since I've been a mother, though, no way. I know how hard it is, and I respect a woman who knows it's not for her. I always say that unless you have a burning desire to have a child, you probably shouldn't do it. Because it's HARD. Because there is little else I can think of that comes with so much responsibility and so little control.

I'm glad Kirkman is happy with her choice, and I'm sorry she's been so badgered by other people that she's had to write a book to defend herself. She's funny and wry, and I enjoyed reading the book (despite my status as a breeder). I know the book wasn't written for my benefit, though, and I hope that women who feel the same was a Kirkman--and who are made to feel defensive about it--find some wisdom and strength in her humor.

Kerrie says

At one point I debated even finishing this book. The first 4 chapters was strictly memoir, her childhood, her parents, trying to make it in comedy, and her early teenage/20s failed relationships. Neurotic, insecure comedienne. Ho hum.

Then at Chapter 5, the whole reason for the book ("I don't want kids and I'm perfectly fine with that!") finally kicked in, and it never let up with the anecdotes of her interactions with People With Kids trying to convince her that "You'd Be a Great Mom!"

As another woman who is perfectly happy to not bring a human life into this world before I die, I **loved this**

book. Years ago in my early 20s, people who knew me finally got the hint and stopped telling me "Oh, you'll change your mind." And I avoid having this rude, arrogant conversation by not interacting with strangers in social situations who don't know me. Poor Jen finds herself in the cocktail party situation a lot, feeling like she has to play defense and consequently wonder if she's not a normal woman. (She has mani-pedis - that makes her a normal chick in my book.)

Her honest way of saying exactly what people are thinking produces some of the best lines of the book. Such as:

At a certain point, we all have to admit that parents asking their children for grandchildren is really just a polite way of parents asking their kids to get down and fuck. *Come on, honey! Take your pants off and let my son-in-law penetrate your vagina without a condom. I know I raised you to be modest but I must ask you, just this once, to put a pillow under your butt and get those legs up over your head so that when he ejaculates his sperm inside of you it just slides right into your uterus and makes me a grandchild on the first night of your honeymoon!*

The numerous anecdotes of rude people questioning her personal choice and calling her selfish was a parade of rage and frustration for me. I'm sure they consider themselves well-meaning, but it's arrogant. The same way that a childless person would berate a parent to their face for making the worse choice for the planet and having a kid, which all the recycling and fuel-efficient/electric hybrid cars you use won't even begin to counteract. I'm sure this happens, and it's just as rude. Why can't people just judge and condemn others **silently**? :D That's how *I* roll.

The most touching story in the whole book was brief. Her single, childless, pet owner sister Violet had stage 3 breast cancer (view spoiler), and what did Violet have to deal with in addition to the nausea from chemotherapy, wanting to sleep all the time and having no energy for anything? Friends and random hospital waiting room strangers felt they had to say:

"Do you regret not having kids?"

"It's too bad you don't have children to help you through this."

I liked Jen's response.

What kind of person would seriously wish for a cancer-ridden single woman to add motherhood to her to-do list? Not to mention wish for a child to exist in the world and have to watch her mother lose all of her hair. And oh, what a shame, Violet didn't get to test out her cancer genes on a new generation. Bummer that her daughter won't grow up to maybe also get breast cancer someday!

I'm sure that parents will take issue at Jen's characterization of parents and their groupthink about The Magic of Kids, but as a blissfully child-free person whose sense of womanhood is not tied to the biological function of a uterus (and is immune to the "cuteness" of babies - repulsed by them, actually), this was a very refreshing read.