



Casting Lots: Creating a Family in a Beautiful, Broken World

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Susan Silverman grew up with parents who were, both before and after a devastating loss, atheists. Yet, as a young adult, she shocked everyone who knew her ("*But you were elected Class Flirt in high school!*") and became a rabbi. What was not surprising, however, was that she built her own big, unwieldy family through both birth and adoption, something she had intended from childhood. With three daughters and two sons ("*We produce girls and import boys*"), this unique family becomes a metaphor for the world's contradictions and complexities-a microcosm of the tragedy and joy, hope and despair, cruelty and compassion, predictability and absurdity of this world we all live in. A meditation on identity, faith, and belonging-one that's as funny as it is moving-*Casting Lots* will resonate with anyone who has struggled to find their place in the world and to understand the significance of that place.

Casting Lots: Creating a Family in a Beautiful, Broken World Details

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From Reader Review Casting Lots: Creating a Family in a Beautiful, Broken World for online ebook

Christine says

Susan Silverman has certainly lived an interesting life, but I found I was interested in things left off the pages. I was specifically interested in her vocation as a Rabbi. She goes into detail how she went to rabbinical school on a whim, didn't even know what rabbis do...and then the entire thing is dropped. Did she ever work as a rabbi? I have no idea. I think her parents were fascinating and my heart broke for their tragic loss. As for Susan herself...I found her extremely annoying. She says they had no money (they had to take out a 2nd mortgage on their house to pay for one of the adoptions), yet her children all attending private school. She goes into great detail about her insistence of her first adopted son being accepted as an Orthodox Jew...yet never mentions a thing about her 2nd adopted son. She also made it seem like the 4yr old son they adopted seamlessly joined their family, I find it hard to believe there weren't any issues. One of her biological kids also seemed to have major issues (punching another child at school) and she brushed it off.

Overall, an ok read and it was interesting to see how much easier adoption was in the 1990s compared to now, but not my cup of tea.

Grade: 2/5

Leah Rachel says

It's probably the highest compliment to an author when a Rabbi can't put your book down even during the High Holy Days, and also chooses it as the book to read the day AFTER the High Holy Days. Rabbi Silverman was my teacher when I was in undergrad, and I remember her teaching with Adari on her lap, Ashira in her belly, and Zamir already a glimmer in her eye. In addition to being an incredible teacher (I loved hearing her tell the Serach story again), she was the first adult I knew who spoke honestly and bluntly about how hard it is to be a parent. Her wisdom, humor, and honesty all come across in this book, where she shares the joy and brokenness of growing up in a complicated family system and building a family of her own. She grounds her experience in the wisdom of the Jewish tradition, even while approaching her own faith with irreverence and a feminist, critical eye. I thought this book was going to be a treatise on why we should all adopt, as Rabbi Silverman is a fierce advocate for adoption, but instead it was a loving memoir about her own family's journey. A must read for parents—adoptive or not—and those considering what it means to create a family of their own.

Kate Irwin-smiler says

This book was not what I expected or wanted this week. It was blurbed more as “parenting in difficult times” (or maybe that's just how I interpreted the title?) - it was almost entirely about their adoption journey and very little about the broken world of the title. So, in that respect, disappointing. I really want the book I thought it was going to be. I need that right now.

It's an interesting story and Silverman has some thoughts on international adoption that are worth considering. I don't have developed thoughts in that regard, but her story is moving.

Lisa Silverman says

Silverman's book (no relation) shares a loving story of adoption and family life, sprinkled with anxiety ridden moments. The book was raw and inspiring.

Hannah says

I really enjoyed this book. I happen to be Jewish and I happen to be an adoptive mom....but I really think many people would find this book enjoyable. Anyone with a deep faith, anyone who is a parent, anyone who has siblings....anyone who has fears, hopes, dreams.... Susan Silverman covers it all without sounding preachy or self-absorbed.

Rabbi Silverman speaks honestly and opening about her own feelings and insecurities - which would/could be spoken by any woman on any given night! I feel like I could be her friend.

I would recommend this book.

Marjorie Ingall says

Very funny, delightfully quirky, sometimes uncomfortable, blisteringly honest. (What else would you expect from Sarah Silverman's sister, the rabbi?) One of my usual complaints about parenting memoirs is that they feel too carefully crafted; even the difficult, scary, infuriating stuff is presented with carefully polished edges and tidy, heart-warming conclusions. Feh. This is not that. Silverman is honest about the depression and better still, FURY, that comes with raising kids.

That said -- the book is kind of sprawling and repetitive, and sometimes seems to skim the surface of big issues. It doesn't feel tightly edited. I also wish the author had wrestled more deeply on the page certain questions of faith and specific parenting issues and transracial adoption. But I don't think it's entirely fair to critique the book I wish I'd read rather than the one the author chose to write. I loved Silverman's voice and I was quite literally THANKFUL for the way the book ineluctably feels TRUE. Ben Franklin once said that half a truth is still a lie. Casting Lots does not feel anything like a lie.

Dov Zeller says

This book has a lot of wonderful moments and I admire the writer's work toward accessing honesty and transparency in relationship to her existential puzzles, and parenting questions, struggles and insecurities.

On the other hand, there are ways this book feels like it's skimming a lot of surfaces. There's not a deep exploration of what it means to Silverman to be Jewish vs. Jewy. And she doesn't explore deeply enough the complexity of her position as an adoptive white parent of two boys who are not white or on her choice to bring them up Jewish and to rely on the fact that there is an Ethiopian Jewish community and so they can do some Ethiopian Jewish things as a way to avoid deeper questioning about connecting adopted children with

their birth cultures.

Her "origin" story about wanting to adopt kids from other cultures also seems a bit unexplored. At what point did the childish dream transform into an adult idea and what did that transformation look like? I worry there is a bit of a "savior complex" somewhere in here rather than a fully sober look at the long term challenges she and her adopted sons will face. Or, maybe I just didn't read the book carefully enough? Or I am not the intended audience? I don't know. I am not a huge fan of memoirs as a form, though now and again I like them. This one feels a bit thinly sliced without the kind of intellectual rigor and deeper emotional honesty and deeper Jewish theological or spiritual searching that might have brought me a bit closer to it. (The honesty in here is one kind of emotional honesty, but not necessarily another.)

Here are a few pages in which Silverman talks of her family's "Jewy-ness" (p. 80 and 81). It's cute and funny, but feels very practiced and not necessarily genuine in the sense of going past the practiced stories one tells about oneself and one's family.

And here is a place in the book where she talks about the question of whether and how to connect adopted children with their birth cultures. On the first read I found it worrisome and a bit dismissive, but on the second read I found it a bit more thoughtful.

I enjoyed reading this review. It's appreciative of the book, but also addresses some of the things I struggled with.
<https://creatingafamily.org/adoption-...>

Sheryl says

I got this book complimentary from PJ Library, a Jewish-themed organization. The rating of 3/5 is not a reflection on Silverman as a person - I admire her unconditionally. She is a rabbi, and along with her husband, they've built an amazing family - three biological daughters and two sons, both adopted from Ethiopia. The things they've navigated, as Jews, as a family, and as parents, are enormous and they do it compassionately and with great thoughtfulness.

I was, however, disappointed with some of the writing. It was honest, and straightforward, both of which I appreciated. I just thought it could have used some better editing - more even editing throughout the book to be precise. I felt like the first two-thirds held my attention, then the remainder of the book was rushed. Memoirs in general seem to suffer from this more so than novels since some of the events have taken place further in history than others. Still, it was choppy to experience that as a reader.

That aside, I'd still recommend it for its unique story of parenting.

Robyn says

This was an unexpected delight. I was offered a free adult book by the PJ Library program and had already read the other offerings, so I figured why not try this. Both hysterical and a beautifully written tale about how family is formed and re-formed over a lifetime. Recommended to anyone with any interest in Jewish

families, international adoption, or what Sarah Silverman was like as a little tot (the author is her big sister).

actual, literal baba yaga. says

Susan Silverman seems like a really cool person but I am middle-of-the-road on this book. It's a little all over the place and doesn't tie together very well, but it had a lot of moments that made me laugh pretty hard, so she's obviously got some talent. I just wish it had been a little more evenly-distributed topic-wise - the author decides to go to rabbinical school on a lark which is never talked about again just BAM SHE'S A RABBI vs. 200 pages addressing the adoption process for her sons from Ethiopia.

But it's specifically a memoir about her family and the Jewish identities of mixed families, so I'm not sure that "I wanted this to be a different book" is a fair criticism.

On the other hand, when have I ever been interested in fair?

It's short and worth a quick read, but \$15 for the Kindle edition may be rightfully off-putting to those who'd be otherwise interested.

Linda Krasnow says

To me, Casting Lots felt unevenly written. The beginning which told of the author's upbringing was vivid and alive with humor and wit. As her religion becomes and main focus of her life (she becomes a Rabbi) philosophy takes over. Her side of the adoption story was hugely interesting. Even more interesting might be her children's perspectives. It was almost a life experiment and I would love to know the results. It felt unfinished and rushed at the end.

Amy says

"Kee tov. It is good." I opened this delicious book at 11 pm for a quick glance and didn't put it down until I got to the last page. What a beautiful exploration of family bonds, adoption, Judaism, anxiety, race and love. Adoption books are not so hard to come by and as an adoptive mom I've got most of them in the house -- It was a real joy to find a book focusing on transracial adoption from a Jewish perspective -- that is very hard to come by and much appreciated. I can't recommend the book highly enough. You know the cliché "I laughed, I cried, it became part of me"? That. And the author's note on The Global State of Adoption was top notch too. The only thing I didn't like is that it kept me up until 1 am because I couldn't make myself put it down.

jj says

It was difficult for me to get in to this book because of the detail involved so I would put it down and read something else and then pick this up to read The author and main character of this book was able to fulfill her lifelong dream of adoption (after having her own children thru childbirth), I truly applaud her for this. She travels across the world two different times to accomplish this. An ordained Rabbi, though not religious, she struggles to have her adopted children accepted in to the Jewish culture, which she want(ed) the orthodoxy

way.

Dominique Egbers says

This is a story of Ms. Silverman's emotions and steadfastness of building a family through child birth and through adoption. It is a heart warming tale, especially for those that are currently thinking about adoption or have adopted.

Tessa says

I enjoyed reading about Susan Silverman's family, her connection with God, and parenting. There were several moments when I teared up (not unusual for me) as her love and honesty is so evident in her writing about her children and the big questions about our world. How do Americans confront privilege in our lives? How does she begin to explain her whiteness to her adopted child of color? How do people find strength when the feeling that you are faltering as a parent, or as a person arises? How do you show up? For the author, God is often a force calling or guiding. For me, I related to the idea of a divine and the necessity of a faith in something. The need to have faith in good in a world seemingly full of suffering. Overall, a hopeful book. Through the telling of her experiences, there is a story about how we can rise to difficult situations, cultivate presence, face our own blind spots and shortcomings, show up for one another, and find the beauty in our imperfect human nature. A quick read at just over 200 pages, felt well worth it.
