

Blogger News Network - Book Review

By: SIMON BARRETT 9/9/2009



I am not sure that I have read a book like this before. Judy Mandel is not famous, she is not a rock star, nor a Nobel prize winner, she is for the most part, a very average person. Her story though, is a very unique one, and one that I found captivating. It is not so much about her, but her family, and maybe a little of her trying to bring order to the chaos that has been her life.

The title *Replacement Child* had my mind running ragged when I saw it. What could it possibly mean?

Judy Mandel has a fascinating story to tell. On January 22, 1952 an American Airlines Convair 240 with 20 passengers and 3 crew crashed into the city of Elizabeth, New Jersey. It was the second crash in 37 days in the city. 7 other people on the ground also lost their lives. One of them was seven year old Donna Mandel, her sister Linda, was severely burned, and the scarring lasted for her entire life.

Judy Mandel was conceived a couple of years later. Was she the replacement child? That is a question that no-one can answer for sure. One thing that is certain is that the events of January 22, 1952 are forever ingrained in this family.

I read a lot of books, I see a lot of styles of writing, but I am not sure that I have ever seen this 'treatment' before. There are three stories told from different viewpoints, they interrelate, and the more you read, the more you see how they intersect.

From the 2000's we have Judy Mandel reflecting on her life, from the 50's and 60's we have Judy relating on her life as a young child, and the third component are the details about American Airlines flight 6780.

As with many books, there needs to be an event to cause someone to put pen to paper. In the case of Judy Mandel it is clearly a wish to uncover the truth. Her older sister Linda survived the carnage, but spent her entire life disfigured from the fire ball that hit her house.

American Airlines settled the law suit for the equivalent of \$2,000,000 in today's world. Two million dollars would keep me and my wife very comfortable for the rest of our lives. However, two million would not go very far if we required repeated surgeries.

Linda Mandel passed away on July 25, 2009. She did not deserve what happened to her, and Judy has done a very fine job of keeping her memory alive. Linda was just a young child when the carnage occurred.

While Linda is a very key player in this book, but she is by no means the only subject. Judy looks at her own life, and reflects on her memories, was she the replacement child? Not for Linda, but for the then seven year old daughter Donna who perished in the crash?

Replacement Child is a thought provoking book, it certainly was not what I was expecting. By switching gears from the 1950's, to the 2000's, to a rather chilling account of the actual event, this book makes for some very disturbing reading.

Describing her sister Judy and part of the permanent disfigurement that her sister had to deal with throughout her life, she has this to say:

A red and brown relief map that traces down her neck from just below her eyes. She wears her hair over the remnants of her ears, which she has pierced herself in defiance – no one would do it for her – to wear earrings.

It is entirely possible that Judy was a *Replacement Child*, in fact it is likely. However the truth must remain forever locked away, the only people that can answer that question are no longer with us.

You can pre-order your copy from Judy Mandel's web site.