



From tragedy to understanding: Newington woman's book uncovers her journey as a replacement child

When a plane crashed into a suburban New Jersey apartment house in January of 1952, Judy Mandel's family would be torn apart. Her oldest sister died in the resulting fire, and the younger sister suffered from severe burns all over her body which would effect her for the rest of her life. Mandel, who would be born two years later, was shielded from most of the details of the tragedy as she grew up.

Following the death of her parents several years ago, Mandel decided that it was time to revisit the details of the incident and find out just how it impacted her parents' lives and her own. The result is a frank, absorbing memoir, *Replacement Child* (Schlesinger Books, 2009, 250 pages). www.schlesingerbooks.com Mandel, who owns her own corporate communications business in Newington, CT, www.mandelassoc.com was reached in Denver, CO, where she has embarked on her first national book tour.

Why did you decide to write the book?

After my parents passed away, I felt a real responsibility to tell their story. I had started keeping files of news clippings, letters, and photos, knowing that my parents were looking to me to somehow write it up. I don't think they would have meant for me to write this particular book. It even turned out differently than I had expected. But I felt I had to tell this story as open and as honestly as I could.

Indeed, you are quite open in the book about a number of topics, including the ups and downs of your parents' marriage, your relationship with your surviving sister over the years, and, most of all, some pretty intense and intimate revelations about yourself, your self image and your relationships with men.

I believed it was important to be honest. To share the honesty was what I learned most from the writers' workshop that I was in. These events, these feelings, they all contributed to the journey I was on and to the person I turned out to be.

What is a "replacement child" and did you know of the term when you started?

No, I had never heard of the term before starting my research, but I discovered that it is the name of a real condition, replacement child syndrome. A replacement child is a child born intentionally to replace a sibling who has died in any way. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1595109 There are many parents who have had such a child who react negatively to the term. But in time the child may regard himself or herself as a replacement child.

Has the writing of this book brought you to a better understanding of your parents and yourself?

Writing the book has turned out to be a journey of forgiveness and understanding, as I was able to clearly see and feel the loss my parents felt about losing their oldest daughter and why they devoted themselves so much to my surviving sister's care as compared to how they treated me. The book has certainly made me aware of how I react to certain situations and how I have gone about making decisions in the past.

How have others reacted to this book?

Well, the book has certainly made me appreciate my husband, David, a great deal, and, I think, helped him to understand me better. I shared chapters with him as I completed them. He was my first reader. He is the one who encouraged me to be so honest. If I had not had that kind of support, I would not have written this type of book or this good of a book. My son just finished reading it and wrote me the most sensitive and touching letter about knowing his mother, and about how close we are--another crying jag for me I'm afraid. Of course, he is one reason I did it. I don't think I ever really knew who my parents were as people, and I wanted to give him that.

How are you enjoying your book tour?

I just completed a reading and book signing in Denver, where several people who consider themselves replacement children came up and talked to me. Other people wanted to talk about the writing process, which was fun. I was impressed by the variety of people who showed an interest in the book and the topic. I'm off to Scottsdale, Arizona for a signing later this week, and back to Connecticut for a reading and signing at the Borders Books and Music store in Farmington, CT on Saturday, October 24. I also have a reading and signing in Connecticut on December 12 at the Barnes and Noble in Manchester.

For further information, visit the book's website at www.replacementchild.com.

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