

Tragedy Brings ‘Replacement Child’ Into Elizabeth Family’s Life

By MARYLOU MORANO

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WESTFIELD – When a plane crashed into her Elizabeth home in 1952, Florence Mandel had to decide which of her two young daughters to save. Believing she could make it back inside to rescue 7-year-old Donna, Mrs. Mandel first grabbed 2-and-a-half-year old Linda and raced with her down the stairs to the street.

Physically restrained from reentering the building, Mrs. Mandel was forced to abandon her oldest child, who perished in the flames.

A horrific tragedy, a decision no parent should ever have to make and a daughter conceived to be a “replacement” for her lost sister are the basis for “Replacement Child,” a memoir written by former Cranford resident Judy Mandel.

A story of hope and heartbreak, “Replacement Child” is a gripping narrative of the crash of American Airlines Flight 6780 into 310 Williamson Street and the trials and triumphs of Ms. Mandel’s family in the aftermath of the firestorm.

The book also brings to the forefront the well documented, but little discussed, “replacement child syndrome,” in which parents purposely have another child as a substitute for one they have lost.

The salvation of her parents, for many years, Ms. Mandel was lost to herself. “For a long time, I could not remember much about my childhood at all, and I think that’s because I felt it wasn’t an important part of my family’s story, and so [it was] insignificant,” said Ms. Mandel.

Writing “Replacement Child” gave the author a new perspective of herself and her family, and of the tragedy that ultimately brought her into their lives.

“The great thing about writing this book was that I finally did see that I helped my mother recover from a depression that may have swallowed her, and [I] was a friend to my sister Linda when she needed one most. I now believe I did help them all by coming into their lives,” she said.

Both of Ms. Mandel’s parents – as well as her sister, who faced her own challenges for more than 50 years after the fire – are now deceased.

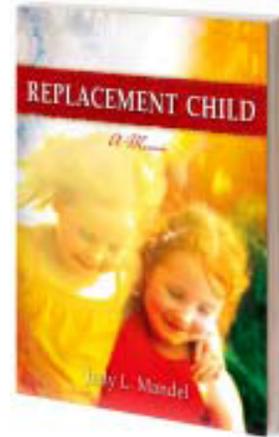
“In a way, [writing “Replacement Child”] was a way to keep my family with me. Now, they live on only in this book since my sister passed away this summer,” she said.

“On the other hand, I’ve learned so much about myself and my own journey by writing the book...it has enriched my life immeasurably and helped me understand many of my life choices,” she said.

Ms. Mandel believes awareness about Replacement Child Syndrome can benefit both parents and children.

According to Ms. Mandel, there are measures that parents can take to avoid some of the issues replacement children deal with throughout life.

For example, she feels that parents should have ample time to grieve for the lost child. She also feels they should avoid any secrecy about the older sibling and his or her death.



“Many of us [replacement children] feel an intense responsibility to live up to the potential of the child that died – I know I did,” she explained.

Ms. Mandel started her writing career as a reporter for *The Hartford Courant*. She has been an advertising copywriter, corporate marketing director and freelance writer, and has worked for several national corporations over the past 20 years.

Ms. Mandel will be at The Town Bookstore on Saturday, November 7, from 11 a.m to 1 p.m. to meet readers and sign copies of “Replacement Child.”

For more information, contact The Town Bookstore at (908) 233-3535.