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Interfaith Families: Personal Stories Of Jewish-Christian Intermarriage



Synopsis

As the number of Jewish-Christian marriages in America continue to rise, couples find themselves searching for ways to reconcile love and religion. Even when each partner has no particular religious life, they are confronted with related conflicts. Should children be raised in one faith and not the other? Who decides which holidays to celebrate and how? How can couples deal with extended family members who may not understand or accept their interfaith marriage? Readers will find an array of reactions and approaches as the couples profiled in this book describe how they tackled these topics. Each personal narrative offers fresh insight into interfaith families by giving examples of the successes and failures, struggles and triumphs of everyday situations and major life decisions.

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Customer Reviews

"[I]t is the candor of the stories that makes this an important resource for discussing intermarriage and conversion issues. This is not a book put together to show us how well things worked out once a decision was made to convert to Judaism or to create a Jewish household. It is obvious that conflicts often arise in interfaith marriages, even when one or both partners define themselves as "non-religious." It is also obvious that the pressure put on couples in these situations by their own families and clergy can be hurtful. Though in most cases the extended families came to accept the choices made by the couples involved, harm was done. This book makes us consider exactly what it is we mean when we talk about creating welcoming communities for interfaith families....Kaplan

has helped us to see alternative, and, it is hoped more effective and more welcoming ways of responding to the challenges of intermarriage."-The Reconstructionist"These stories make clear that there are numerous challenges to maintaining a two-faith family."-Chicago Tribune"[T]his book works like a support group, The reader doesn't get answers, but discovers many possibilities."-The Dallas Morning News/Connecticut Post/DallasNews.com"Couples in Jewish-Christian marriages describe their experiences. The book offers examples of the successes and failures, struggles and triumphs of such religiously mixed families."-Shofar"[I]nterfaith Families is a readable and useful reference tool for couples, their families and congregational support groups....[t]his is a worthwhile addition to any congregational library."-Church and Synagogue Library Association"What this book illustrates is that there are indeed problems in intermarriage, but that most couples come to an accommodation that satisfies both parties, and that Jews are not going to disappear from American life very soon."-Multicultural Review"[B]rings to life the subtleties and the process of ongoing familial negotiations behind dry intermarriage statistics....puts to rest the notion that intermarriage means the doubling of the Jewish community, rather than its destruction."-Jerusalem Post"She goes beyond the statistics to provide a picture of how their religious identity evolved over the course of marriage. In the process, she ends up describing an enormous hybrid sub-culture of North American Judeo-Christian families, that differs "strikingly" from all other American Jews."-JPOST.COM"Interfaith Families: Personal Stories of Jewish-Christian Intermarriage is not a guide. Indeed, Kaplan specifically avoids offering any advice. Rather, she presents the interviews in a readable way, and makes initial observations only in her Introduction....Her observations are fascinating."-interfaithfamily.com"[U]seful for intermarried couple and their parents is Kaplan's Interfaith Families; the author delivers more than 50 portraits of individuals and couples touched by intermarriage, and then steps out of the picture. "There were no experts who stepped in to comment on the material or to offer their interpretations," she writes....Kaplan's work provides a welcome opportunity to learn "the kinds of details only someone experiencing a situation firsthand could know."-Lilith"~his book works like a support group, The reader doesn't get answers, but discovers many possibilities."-The Dallas Morning News/Connecticut Post/DallasNews.com"~nterfaith Families is a readable and useful reference tool for couples, their families and congregational support groups....~his is a worthwhile addition to any congregational library."-Church and Synagogue Library Association"~rings to life the subtleties and the process of ongoing familial negotiations behind dry intermarriage statistics....puts to rest the notion that intermarriage means the doubling of the Jewish community, rather than its destruction."-Jerusalem Post"~seful for intermarried couple and their parents is Kaplan's

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Jane Kaplan's nuanced interviews suggest that interfaith relationships can be tricky terrain for couples, whether both partners are religiously observant or secular in orientation....[t]his is an interesting and useful book, although not a "book" in the traditional sense. Certainly couples concerned with Jewish-Christian interfaith relationships will find this volume valuable. The interviews offer some good starting points for discussion among a broader audience or students of Sociology of Religion. Interfaith relationships can work, but couples have to have clear (and honest) communication about their religious beliefs and feelings. Nor should they expect a resolution that looks like their neighbour's. The interpretation of religious practice and belief are unique to the couples who struggle with achieving a satisfactory solution to the issues of faith and practice.

-Journal of Comparative Family Studies

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Studies" Puts flesh on the bare bones of the statistics about Jewish/Christian intermarriage. Jane Kaplan has chosen people with a variety of approaches to the subject, and shaped their narratives deftly and unobtrusively into an engrossing and useful book." -Mary Helene Rosenbaum Director, Dovetail Institute for Interfaith Family Resources "This book puts a human face on the challenges of being a dual-faith family. Reading it, couples will gain insight and comfort, and clergy will learn of their pain and conflicts. Its sensitive portrayals of couples--often isolated and struggling on their own--suggests the need for new institutions to support these uncharted journeys." -Sheila C. Gordon, Ph.D. President, Interfaith Community Inc., "I have used Jane Kaplan's book to bring real people's stories into the room while helping couples and families in the process of understanding and making interfaith decisions. The book helps folks hear struggles, thoughts, feelings, conflicts, and joys of others in similar positions. Hearing these stories creates a support group for each and every person. In the book, there is always someone in which to identify. There is always some alternative that is new and creative. There is always one story to help soothe a struggle...." -Mary Jo Barrett, Director of Training Center for Contextual Change University of Chicago --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

As the number of Jewish-Christian marriages in America continue to rise, couples find themselves searching for ways to reconcile love and religion. Even when each partner has no particular religious life, they are confronted with related conflicts. Should children be raised in one faith and not the other? Who decides which holidays to celebrate and how? How can couples deal with extended family members who may not understand or accept their interfaith marriage? Readers will find an array of reactions and approaches as the couples profiled in this book describe how they tackled these topics. Each personal narrative offers fresh insight into interfaith families by giving examples of the successes and failures, struggles and triumphs of everyday situations and major life decisions.

This is one of my favorite of the many books I read about interfaith families before marrying my husband. It was the only book I found that was a collection of first-hand experiences. The couples shared the actual issues that come up as families tackle things beyond the holidays, like discussions about death and heaven to name a couple. I found the book informative and touching.

This is an amazingly well presented collection of interviews that were conducted with people that were involved in an interfaith marriage. The author breaks down the interviews into those who are

raising children Jewish; raising them Christian; raising them with both religions; other alternatives; and lastly, those marriages where one spouse converts to the religion of the other. Although each interview ranges from a few pages to about 8, the full range of emotions come out which show the hurt from the family of the spouse; sometimes the hurt from the spouse; and the frustration at trying to be even-handed and finding out how difficult it really is. Although I am of the camp that feels that interfaith marriage can't work, I would consider this required reading if only for the range of situations that are covered and how each couple handles them.

It is a good book for those of us interested in interfaith marriages/family, the stories people share are quite illustrative and are very relatable. In the end just humans trying to make their marriage and family work. If there is something this book taught me is that what works for some, might not work for all, every couple must find its own way.

This is a very good example of the life story method used outside the boundaries of the academic world (I think). The testimonies are very well presented, they give the reader the feeling that there was no interviewer or editor, which is great.

Great to get people's experience that have done this. It's one thing to think about it. Another to see the real life outcomes

Loved that there are stories from folks that did it all kinds of ways. Many books on the topic seem to lean one way, but this covered it all.

very insightful

A very insightful book. I'm currently in an interfaith relationship which has the possibility of someday becoming serious. I read this to learn what I was getting into and for some insight on the choices I may have to make someday. The book confirmed what me and my boyfriend felt all along and warned us of some obstacles we may have to overcome in the future. Basically, it's made up of first person stories and reflections. These stories are broken into sections based on the approach the family took. First was families who kept Jewish homes and raised their children to identify as Jews. Most of these families had a positive experience. Some obstacles were that the Jewish partner wasn't that observant and actually left it up to the Christian partner to teach the children about

Judaism, and to keep a kosher home and do all the holiday work. My reaction to this section was that it convinced me this was a positive and practical way to go. Second was families who have Christian homes and raised their children as Christians. This typically only happened if the Jewish partner themselves was from a mixed family (had a Christian parent). The Jewish partners in this section were not only non-observant, but also semi observant of Christian holidays. These families seemed happy, but my reaction was that unless the Jewish partner came from a mixed home, this is a very unlikely approach. Third was families which attempted to raise their children both Jewish and Christian. In most cases this was a disaster. Identity confusion, hostility between partners and regret was common. After reading this section, it's not an approach I would consider. Fourth was families who "tried something else." This was diverse, including nothing, or being secular or apathetic. I felt this was a disaster, and most families said they regretted this. Another family raised their 2 sons as Jews and 1 daughter as a Christian. This family clearly expressed that this was an experiment gone bad, and not to do this. I agree. In this whole section, the families seemed like they regretted their choice and were not that happy. The only exception is the family which decided to join a Unitarian Universalist congregation, they were very happy and it seemed positive. This chapter definitely convinced me that children need some religious training, anything is better than nothing. The Fifth and final section was on families in which one partner converted. Some of these families were happy, some of these families were strained after waiting years and years for the conversion to happen, some were estranged from their parents, and some of these families are broken and now divorced. Over all, this chapter was very negative and cast a negative light on conversion. I think the writing and presentational style in this book is great. I agree with most of the points it makes and I think it's well researched with the exception of the conversion chapter. I am giving this book 4/5 instead of 5/5 because I feel there was a strong selection bias on the families in the conversion chapter. The only families considered for this chapter were ones in which the partner did not convert for spiritual reasons, but instead converted because their spouse or in laws pressured them to. And all the conversions were conducted after the couple was wed. This likely explains the high divorce rate among these couples - one partner is doing something they spiritually are in conflict with just to please the other. I think that if this chapter had included examples of people who converted for practical and spiritual reasons pre-marriage, then the outcome would be different. My boyfriend never read the book, but he likes it because it essentially convinced me that keeping Jewish home and having Jewish children is the right thing for us to do.

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