

Rosenbaum, Linda. (2014). Not Exactly as Planned: A Memoir of Adoption, Secrets and Abiding Love. Bradford: Demeter Press.

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Linda Rosenbaum's book, "Not Exactly as Planned", intimately follows the strains, joys, hardships, and memories that follows upon Linda's decision to adopt a newborn child, Michael, who was initially undiagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). The narrative discusses the traumatic backstory of Rosenbaum including raids on her father's family jewellery store, the rape of her and her friend, moving to a new country, and the demands of motherhood. Throughout, it highlights significant secrets and whole-hearted love, as well as the impending consequences that follow with each. By choosing a first-person narrative to tell the story, Rosenbaum creates an atmosphere that allows the reader to follow along closely, resulting in the creation of a sympathetic atmosphere with the readers. What makes the book impactful is Rosenbaum's unique personal account of the adoption of an FASD child, as well as capturing the lasting effects it has on not only the parent (primarily the mother), but the child and extended family- whether by blood, or through the community as well.

Rosenbaum discusses the impact of her mother's questionable decisions throughout her childhood and the effects they hold over her in the long-term. Focusing on secret keeping, she recounts the secret her mother kept from her throughout her childhood: that her grandma had not been dead, but rather been committed into a mental institution. Taking into account the stigma that had been present during that time period, Rosenbaum discusses the negative consequences that her

mother-daughter relationship had suffered after she had uncovered the truth. The idea of secret holding is initially viewed as negative, and it is Rosenbaum's best intentions to not follow her mother's choices with her future child. However, a recurring theme of secrets portrays the reality that it is not possible to keep this promise to herself. She touches base on the idea of feeling compelled to keep secrets, such as her rape, from her parents as well as keeping Michael's birth parents identity secret. The hardships are discussed in a way where the reader is able to understand the reasoning behind the secret keeping, and allows the readers, to an extent, to also weigh the pros and cons that Rosenbaum finds herself facing throughout the book. In doing so, the book is able to spread light on the complexity that follows with making important life decisions because the reader is able to see into the mind of the narrator.

In the early stages of adoption, Rosenbaum discusses the legal aspects and the exhaustive process that she had not been expecting. She shines light on the hardships of having to "find [her] own" (p. 82) baby to adopt- little help had been provided on the business side. In doing so, the book is able to capture the more harsh, tiresome side that follows in the adoption process. Rather than highlighting merely the joyful aspects, she includes issues of financial strain and the emotional battles she and her husband had consistently faced before ultimately deciding to adopt a family-friends newborn. Rosenbaum opens up to the readers to her struggles when the time came to adopt as well, including the heartbreaking reality that the birth mother had no obligation to follow through with giving her baby up for adoption, nor were Rosenbaum and her husband sure at all whether they were ready to adopt. In addition, she touches base on how she had put her personal career goals on hold upon news of hearing of an available newborn to adopt. The

economic and personal sacrifices that she explains throughout the book allows readers, particularly mothers and fathers, to empathize with her circumstances and experiences.

The no-nonsense writing style that Rosenbaum uses provides a matter-of-fact, personal story that provides a sense of authenticity as well. With this emotional honesty, she is able to capture her audience with a compelling and powerful story that includes her idealistic youth growing up in the 1960s. In search of a safe haven after her rape, Rosenbaum has created a book in which the readers follow along her emotional journey. Crying when she cried, laughing when she did, and rooting for her as an outsider looking in, Rosenbaum flawlessly integrates her journey through family conflicts, adoption, and caring and advocating for a child with FASD. While Rosenbaum's work recounts her personal story, she speaks with a sense of universality concerning love, hope, acceptance and perseverance that allows all readers to relate to.

In addition to the financial, emotional, and physical burdens that followed upon the adoption of Michael, who had not been diagnosed with FASD until the age of six, Rosenbaum also portrays her journey in learning, adapting to, and advocating for children with FASD and special needs. Through the many obstacles she has faced, Rosenbaum writes elegantly with laces of humor and grace. Because the audience is able to see into her mind, Michael is also presented as a child that the readers feel as though they are parental figures over him. Personally speaking, while reading this book I felt a close connection to Michael. Celebrating his accomplishments, and aching for his struggles throughout the book. Although I do not have children of my own, this book has brought on lessons that I am also able to relate to: overcoming adversity, stigmatizations, and not having life lay out as I had initially planned.

Although Rosenbaum does an immaculate job portraying the struggles of life, there are aspects that did not go into as much detail as I had initially thought. Although it provides another point of view of motherhood on raising a child with FASD, the information on FASD in and of itself had not been as in depth. Much of the book was founded on depression, anxiety, the adoption, and heavily on her Jewish faith. The book was in depth, to the point, and elegant in how these aspects were presented, however I found that FASD was seldom talked about through a medical lens. It is, though, discussed in the book that because of the time period she had grown up in (the 1960s), there had been little help and research done on this diagnosis by doctors. With that being said, Rosenbaum does an excellent job in portraying the life of raising a child from her point of view. Additionally, because the book is told from the perspective of the mother, it lacked the same level of intimacy and personal connection between the reader and the husband and outside roles.

The intended readership for this book includes, most specifically, adoptive parents (with a focus on mothers) with a child, or children, diagnosed with FASD. However, the nature of the book creates aspects that those who are not parents, nor individuals who grew up in the 1960s, can also relate to. It allows prospective parents to perhaps become more aware of adoption, its processes, and what follows. As well, it creates more awareness for children who are diagnosed with FASD, their struggles, and the joys that come along with them. For those who are not inclined to have children, Rosenbaum heavily focuses on the idea of secrets, secret-keeping, and having undying faith. The tragic backstory discussed followed by fleeing to Canada from the United States, and the traumas that she personally faces day-to-day brings an intensity and realistic point of view of mental health. For academics such as psychologists, sociologists, and social workers,

this book does a wonderful job in portraying child development and parenting. It discusses the styles of parenting, the family dynamic, and the relationships between a child, the parents, and the community. The story not only depicts motherhood, nor does it focuses on family. Instead, Rosenbaum's book is a story that presents life and the decisions we make as being unpredictable as the title suggests.

Overall, I found "Not Exactly as Planned" to be a page-turner, that had me immediately drawn from the first page. I found it admirable that Rosenbaum had put her raw, real life experiences into a book for others to read. Kudos must also be given to the family and husband as well, as they too had their fair share of obstacles to face in this book. Rosenbaum was able to create a book that had put her pain and love on full display, and has been able to create an entrancing and awe-inspiring book as a result.