



KVETCH: ONE BITCH OF A LIFE--A Memoir of Music & Survival

Greta Beigel

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"Kvetch: One Bitch of a Life," journalist Greta Beigel's memoir about growing up an Orthodox Jew and a tormented child piano prodigy in South Africa, is now in paperback. The story offers a rare look at Jewry's response to the events of apartheid, circa the 1960s. And goes behind the scenes of two rarefied worlds: classical music performance--and the workings of a California metropolitan daily newspaper.

KVETCH: ONE BITCH OF A LIFE--A Memoir of Music & Survival Details

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Omar says

I read it in one sitting, it fascinated me that much. I learned about humanity and a bit about myself in the process.

Dhivya Balaji says

Kvetch – One bitch of a life is a memoir of the author, Greta Beigel. Knowing very little about and having absolutely no experience about memoirs, I took this book up to respond to the author's review request. But maybe because this book is my first of this kind, or maybe this book does not fall under the category I am a fan of, I found this book only mildly interesting. But one thing to be said as a fair measure: The book is a really riveting memoir.

Greta starts describing her early life and her passion with playing the piano. She talks about how she didn't have a family man for a dad. She is left to live (along with her siblings) with a mother who supports her music passion with almost manic intensity. But Greta loves the piano and is able to sidle with her mother's wish to make her a great pianist. But her mother makes her do, what she can never have done in her youth. But as Greta grows up with the influence of a few people, she remembers a prophetic word of a neighbour, something that lives with her forever, "Remember Greta," she (the neighbour) says without provocation," it's better to have been a has-been, than a never wasser."

The author recalls in vivid details, her first recital in a recording room, her passion with Elvis who stormed the music scene in the 1950s, and her wish to go to America. Her descriptions of apartheid are brilliantly accurate and bring the scene to life. The book is filled with equal measures of aims, aspirations, agony.

We are also given an insight into the author's wishes to get her name in print, all the while trying to abide by her mother's wishes and trying to 'get a man'. The recollections are laced with humour and a trace of sarcasm, sometimes directed towards the mother.

This book has it all, inexperienced trysts with men, failed marriage, lost recitals, even a cosmetic surgery thrown in. The author's experiences in America are laced with good times and a few laughs and happy sighs. The roller coaster ride across three countries travels back and forth in time frames too.

The various twists and turns in the life leave you with an almost sceptic wonder, if so much could happen to a single woman. But it has happened and it has been documented. The best that can be said for this book and its first and foremost quality is, it is honest. Not self trumpeting or glossing out details.

But sometimes, one cannot help but feel confused as the author switches between what we would call 'mind-

voice' and explanatory. And the second confusion arises when the author keeps going back and forth between countries and the past, and present, with harrowing and humorous experiences mixed together in a sweet-sour cocktail.

Find out how the little girl from Johannesburg went from being a pianist to a journalist for LA times. Read this memoir to have a inside account of Greta as she recounts her experiences, not day by day, year by year, rather like post-it notes that track every idea just as you remember it. This book is a beautiful collection of post-it notes and the author is recounting the experiences as much for her as for the reader.

Lauren Sapala says

I had an interesting emotional time with this story. Parts of it were so heartbreaking and poignant that I found myself near tears, and other parts were so funny—but also still so heartbreaking and poignant—that I found myself literally laughing and almost crying at the same time.

The narrator is a young Jewish woman who is raised in South Africa, discovers early on she is a piano prodigy, and then subsequently moves to America, where she lives in LA (and works at the LA Times as a journalist), Boston, Hawaii and Oregon, and also travels the world as she attempts to find peace of mind and reconcile herself with the demons of her past. But the story itself is about so much than this. It encompasses the intensely difficult separation from an abusive parent, the experience of sexual abuse at the hands of a sibling, and the sorrowful pressures women can be subjected to as a result of bad marriages, workaholism, and loss of identity. This book deals with some really super heavy psychological and emotional stuff. However, the writer's voice is what carries it off. Throughout the entire book, the narrator is wry, insightful, humorous, and even wise.

I would put this book on my list of top ten memoirs that every woman should read. It shows us not only the path of courage, but reassures us that you can still be afraid (and that being afraid is a totally normal reaction to these hard situations) and still move forward on your path with courage.

Loved, loved, loved it.

Neola says

These children had a hard life because of their troubled parents. The mother made me angry sometimes. Could not blame the father for leaving. Told in a matter of fact way.

Darlene says

Kindle Version ASIN: B005GFI5MO

Kathleen Pooler says

A heartfelt journey from abuse to transformation.

In a spare and powerful narrative, this heartfelt memoir takes us on a human journey through an abusive childhood in 1940's South Africa under Apartheid. Greta enjoyed a relatively privileged childhood in apartheid Johannesburg but her life with an unstable, long-suffering mother, an absent father and a cruel older brother become the foundation for her discontent. She weaves in her Jewish culture, the politics of the times with Apartheid and her love of music and piano playing in a way that brings me into her experience. Greta is a child piano prodigy. Her mother focuses on her piano playing as a means of building herself up and frequently makes demands of Greta to practice and perform for the benefit of the family image. Her mother who is forced to work as an office assistant, longs to be a "trophy wife of a rich Jewish businessman" and takes every opportunity to let Greta know of her displeasure. She demands that Greta keep her company because she (the mother) may "have a heart attack." She also tries to school her in the fine art of seducing a man. Greta's love of music becomes her pathway to escape the pain of abuse and neglect but her mother's influence seeps into her marriage to Ralph which lasts less than a year.

Greta's ability to confront her personal demons honestly is admirable. She moves back and forth in time to weave a compelling narrative of loss and searching. Desperate to leave South Africa and the clutches of her mother, Greta applies for and wins a music scholarship in the United States and reunites with her father. Returning to South Africa soon after, she realizes her relationship with her mother has not changed and she returns to California to face a series of incestuous encounters with her brother. In later years as a reporter and editor for the Los Angeles Times, she receives a phone call that her mother has died. She reflects upon her losses and attempts to reconcile her painful past with her present life, where she finds solace and growth in writing.

Judy says

The writing was disjointed with events not necessarily in chronological order. The author experienced a very dis functional family life. I would hope that her news stories are better written. This was not what I was expecting.

Therese says

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Alison says

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Christoph Fischer says

"Kvetch: One Bitch of a Life" by Greta Beigel is an impressive and insightful memoir.

Born into a Jewish family in the poorer parts of apartheid Johannesburg little Greta's talent for the piano is used by her mother to compensate for other riches. Her emotional, professional and amorous development is well portrayed, with humour and sadness, reflection and anger.

There are some shocking revelations, such as incestuous molestation and other personal tragedies but there is also a lot to laugh and smile about.

I enjoyed the memoir for its insight into a world that I knew nothing of, the world of Jews in an apartheid-times South Africa and the life of a concert pianist.

There is much to enjoy, a great memoir.
