



The Draw: A Memoir

Lee Siegel

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A young boy's awakening to the conflict between innate gifts and social class is at the center of this searing memoir about the unforgiving sovereignty of money

Hoping to make a killing in New Jersey real estate, the author's father, Monroe Siegel, takes a draw from his employer against unearned commission. When the recession hits in the 1970s, Monroe finds himself owing a small fortune to his firm. He sinks toward divorce and bankruptcy, while Lola, Lee's mother, suffers a nervous breakdown that turns her into a different person.

Shamed and enraged by his father's fate, Lee grows up wondering what society owes a person who has failed materially but preserved his humanity. "Other men got rewarded for their cold-heartedness, and often for their dishonesty, while he, Monroe Siegel, who had never hurt anyone, had to groan and stumble through life. Did not kindness deserve an income?"

As a teen, Lee tries to make a different life for himself. He goes to a private college in the Midwest, is forced to leave due to his father's bankruptcy, and returns to New Jersey to work a series of menial jobs. He enrolls at a state college and then drops out to seek a better existence abroad, only to return to the United States in debt and in despair. Suddenly, a promising new life opens to him. At a price.

The Draw touches on fundamental questions: How do we balance our obligations to ourselves with our obligations to others? What do we owe society when its rules have a legal basis but not a moral one? Written with startling candor and psychological acuity, Lee Siegel's *The Draw* is for anyone who has ever struggled with money, or who has tried to break through the barriers of family and class.

The Draw: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review *The Draw: A Memoir* for online ebook

John Sundman says

Last week I happened to be in Siegel's agent's office waiting to meet with a friend who works in the same office. By chance I grabbed a galley of this book off a shelf and started reading. By the time my friend showed up I was 35 pages in, and I was hooked.

I walked out of that office with a complimentary copy of *The Draw* from Markus Hoffman, the agent, so I guess the polite thing to do is write a review.

In the first several pages of *The Draw* we meet Lee (his father calls him "Lee-Boy") a young man from New Jersey, on the eve of his departure for college, visiting his complicated and not altogether nice Russian-Jewish maternal grandfather in the Bronx as the two of them try to make sense of the boy's wackadoodle mother's recent divorce from the boy's kind, sensitive, jazz-loving, pathetically milquetoast father. Grandfather and grandson are equally distraught about the situation, but for entirely different reasons, from different perspectives. Siegel does a masterful job of painting this picture. This is good writing.

Nobody is especially religious in this family and the boy is just an all-American high school kid who hangs out with academic underachievers from mostly Irish- and Italian-American backgrounds -- who are basically nerds but who also drink a lot -- but still the Holocaust and the pogroms that drove Lee's grandparents to America hover over the Siegels like some kind of evil fog.

The Draw is a well-written, often depressing/disturbing memoir by an introspective fellow who grew up in New Jersey not too far away from, nor long after where and when I grew up in New Jersey.

We both ended up as writers (he being a lot more prominent than me). We both felt the pull of New York City in our teenage years and early 20's. We both worked a variety of menial jobs, had immigrant grandparents, and so forth. After many misadventures he found his way to Montclair State College and eventually to Columbia University's School of General Education -- the same route followed by my older brother Mike. I was born in Montclair, even. So there were many things in Siegel's experience that I could relate to.

But boy, were our childhoods different. Siegel came from a messed up family that started out in the lower middle class and went steadily downhill from there. I came from a nurturing family that started out lower middle class and made a steady ascension all through my youth. When I was born my father had recently made the leap from truck driver to bill collector; when I graduated high school he was VP of finance for a multinational corporation & he and my mother attended the NYC Ballet & Metropolitan Opera. When Siegel graduated high school his father was living in a rented room, eking out a very modest living as a piano teacher. Lee Siegel grew up in a postwar suburban "split-level" house on what sounds like a dreary street; beyond the backyard fence was a busy highway. I grew up on a farm with cows and sheep and chickens and fruit trees and a vegetable garden. (There are many varieties of experience in New Jersey.)

No surprise, given all this, that as a young man Siegel has "issues".

Siegel is honest about his self-sabotaging and self-destructive habits, his mean streak and other faults. I actually knew somebody who reminds me a lot of the young Siegel as he presents himself in *The Draw*. He was one of my 2 closest friends all through college. Utterly brilliant. Interested in everything. Thrillingly

unpredictable. But also abrupt, mean-spirited, inexplicably unkind to people who were nice to him. Eventually being friends with him just became too much work. The Lee Siegel portrayed in this book has many of these attributes.

But it's not hard to see where they came from, given the whirlpool he grew up in. I kept thinking, as I read this, phew, was I lucky. (And yet I have to own up to some of the very self-sabotaging behaviors he describes in himself. Unlike him, I don't have screwed up parents to blame them on.)

For all the dysfunction he describes, Siegel still has wells of affection, or at least compassion, for the people in his family (except for his brother, with whom he seems to have no connection whatsoever). He does not pity himself or blame others for his faults. Rather, he tries to explain where he came from and how he got started on the road to adult he became. Running through the whole story is his conviction, from a very early age, that he was going to grow up to be a writer. And somehow that dream, that assurance, which often looked possibly absurd given his kafkaesque circumstances, got him through.

The Draw is a moving and thought-provoking book. I liked it a lot.

Chris says

An interesting life honestly told.

Linda says

There's a lot of suffering going on, Lee Siegel had his share. His parents, though, wow, what a pair. This book is often illuminating, but equally self-indulgent, which is disappointing. He's a wonderful writer, but this book needed a more ruthless editor.

Justene says

It was just weird. It didn't communicate the emotion that I've felt with other memoirs, and I just didn't really like it that much.

There were some parts that made me feel more uncomfortable than sympathetic for the character, and it was hard to connect with the author.

I also feel like I was forcing myself to read in some parts, and honestly, this just wasn't the best book that I've read.

Virginia Van says

Recounts Siegel's struggles a sensitive child to deal with a family devastated by his father's bankruptcy and

his mother's emotional breakdown which turns her into her son's adversary. Retreating into a world of literature, philosophy and music, he struggles from menial job to menial job and from woman to woman dreaming all the time of a life within the protective walls of a university. The effect of money - or lack of it - on a young man's life is vividly portrayed, though at times the book becomes perhaps too introspective and philosophical.

Olga Vannucci says

It took time to bridge the disconnect
Between his real life and his intellect.

Siddharth Watwe says

Trusting a random book recommendation list which I found on the internet, I picked this up. And boy, am I glad I did so. A good way to, nearly, end 2017.

I love books that involve thoughts printed straight on to the paper and conversations just act as fodder for more internal monologue. Lee Siegel has been shockingly honest in what is one of the best memoirs I've read, to date.

I am going gaga over this, maybe because I could connect with myriad of the thoughts in the book, but hey, that's exactly what a book is supposed to do. Thank you Lee-boy!
