



Nothing: Something to Believe in

Nica Lalli

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What is it like to grow up in a house with no religion? What kind of experiences does someone have when one is not a believer and yet comes into constant contact with religion? How can a person find out what they are when they focus primarily on what they are not?

These are the questions raised in the memoir *Nothing*. With humor, wit, and poignant insight, Nica Lalli recounts her mishaps and misadventures with religion from early childhood into her adult years. As a questioning child, unsure of her idea of God, then a teenager feeling like an outsider, and finally an adult mother confronted by her husband's born-again Christian family and questions from her own children, Nica vividly describes her struggle to find out what kind of "something" she really is. In the end, the author finds that "nothing" is a philosophy to be embraced rather than feared.

Nothing is an appealing, sensitively written story that offers hope, humor, and reason to millions of similar Americans who feel alienated in an ever more religiously polarized nation.

Nothing: Something to Believe in Details

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Todd says

I thought this book would be an interesting place to start answering Some Questions about my own beliefs. Thumbing through it at the library, I found it to have a light narrative feel. But when I started reading it at home, it was unfortunately *too* light and unstructured. And as formative as the author thinks her childhood years may be concerning her beliefs, I could only make it through 5 chapters of childhood tales before admitting the book really wasn't going anywhere fast. Another reader probably could have skipped ahead to the relevant adult chapters, but I can't enjoy--or even read--a book that way.

Brianna Stuart says

really really struck a chord with me. this would be the one book i would hand to someone and say, "if you want to understand how i fell about religion, here's the manual". i have, of course, some slight differences with it, but all in all, very close. i was sort of blown away to read something that expressed so well the predicament of how to fit in to the world around you (not in the sense of being LIKE it, but just of being IN it) when even the most basic frame of reference people use doesn't include a space that accounts for you; and, just as important, how to be okay with that. it's NOT a self-help book - it's just a story of how one woman experienced it, and how those around her experienced her.

Ariel says

Pretty charming. Though I found myself frustrated with the author sometimes, confused with her at others, I generally enjoyed the piece because it gave me a look at secular thought and atheism both in a time before my own and a different country. I've never had the chance of encountering some of the people the author had been faced with throughout her life, and it gave me some motivation to know what I would and wouldn't say. I feel like I learned from her enthusiasm as much as I've learned from what I consider her mistakes.

Although I agree with some other reviews in that she saw her parents belief as automatically her belief, and later her own position as something that her children inherited - I don't understand that sort of logic. If we had more people telling their children "this is what I believe" rather than "this is what WE believe" in terms of metaphysical concepts, we might have a fewer people blindly following family tradition in order to keep familial appearances and relations. Because really, that's what Nica Lalli's life philosophy boiled down to - wanting to strengthen family ties and diminish the dogmatic borders that kept humanity apart. Why she would espouse that belief while still claiming that SHE decides her children's spiritual position (until they are old enough, of course) is beyond me.

Shauta Marsh says

Nothing: Something To Believe In is a memoir of how the author Nica Lalli came to be comfortable being

atheist in today's ultra-religious society. She discusses moments in her childhood where religion was appealing and times when it was frightening. The impact religion and being non-religious had on her and her frustration in knowing it didn't make sense but not why.

Eventually she marries into a conservative Christian Family and the memoir expresses how she deals with being unaccepted and rejected by her sister-in-law. By the end she understands what she believes in and not just what she doesn't. I really enjoyed it and heck, I might just send it to my crappy sister-in-law.

Fran says

overall, this book didn't quite live up to what i had hoped it would. it had such potential.. but ended up just falling short for me. i think part of it has to do with the fact that nica lalli is NOT a writer.. so her narration was awfully elementary.. and ended up coming off as more of a housewife telling you her story over coffee at the kitchen table rather than a writer taking you on a journey through her life and her psyche. also, about midway through the book i realized that nica lalli was not going to do what i was hoping she would- she was not going to delve into why she so strongly rejects religion, but instead was just going to tell more stories about how she struggled to be accepted in her life as "nothing." as someone who rejects organized religion and believes passionately in various atheistic notions myself, i was really hoping to connect to this book and this author because i was anticipating a strong conviction of thought.. and lalli has that, but not in what matters. she is sure she's nothing, but never really tells you what it is about religion that she is so against. basically she just spends half the book bitching about how she wants to be respected for not accepting jesus in her life and while i'm all for that.. i just wish she went into why.. because that's what i'm interested in. i feel like this book had such potential to make such a meaningful smart statement... but it plateaued and i was always waiting for the intelligent sentiments that just never came. by the end of the book i just wanted to yell at lalli for her intellectual cowardice- i feel like she never had the courage to actually figure out why she was "nothing"... making her just as bad as the jesus freaks she seems to despise. she spends so much time defending the fact that she believes in no type of religion that it becomes clear by the end of the book that the only reason she is "nothing" as an adult is because she was raised as "nothing" by her parents.. and the way i see it, that situation has just as much an absence of original thought and cogitation on the subject as all of the people who grow up "praising the lord" just because they went to church as children and their parents lived a life with a faith in fairytales OOPS i mean the bible. although i like the fact that lalli is skeptical enough to realize how loony most aspects of christianity are, i wonder if she would have come to that same conclusion if she had grown up christian. what i mean to say is, she didn't demonstrate to me that she is really that much of an original thinker.. because she never really got into the meat of the matter. i mean it wasn't horrible, i was just expecting so much more.

Carol says

SOMETHING TO RELATE TO...

I picked this up on a whim one night, started reading it when I got home, and I just couldn't put it down! So many of Nica's experiences seemed like my own, and I even cried at parts. This memoir shows what it's like to be a "nothing" in America. And more importantly, it shows that we're really not all that different from everybody else. I highly recommend this, no matter if you're a "nothing" or a "something." This memoir has something everyone can relate to-- the struggle everyone goes through in life to find oneself, to define one's own beliefs.

(link to amazon.com review: <http://www.amazon.com/review/R3K5UDSD...>)

Melody says

I'm the choir that Lalli's preaching to with this book; I'm a nonbeliever married to a nonbeliever, raising a passel of nonbelieving spawn. Unlike me, though, Lalli did not come easily to atheism. Though she's never been a theist, she has struggled mightily with feeling that she should believe. The guilt got really boring in pretty short order. Lalli's a painter by vocation, not a writer. Her sentences are short and choppy, and there's little narrative flow. Give it a miss.

Jeannette says

This book is broken in two parts. I would give the first half a 3. It described a childhood of growing up as "nothing" which I couldn't relate to. It also sounded like it was written by a child. I was always frustrated with the fact that a preteen would be distrustful of "jesus freaks". Does not sound very free thinking to me. On the other hand, I found the second half very relatable, as I went through the same struggles with in-laws and marriage. Overall it was a quick and interesting read. If you are looking for intellectual stimulation however, this book is not for you.

Laurie says

I learned of this book because the author is part of my husband's extended family. I was intrigued because she is the child of a non-practicing Catholic and a non-practicing Jew--exactly like my daughter. I have not found many books (or articles) about raising children without religion/spirituality, a topic that interests me. This book did not have as much on the topic as I'd hoped, but it is an interesting memoir.

amber says

I'm not sure what I thought I would get out of this book. Her unwavering atheism was reassuring; for a moment I was worried she would wuss out in some situations, but Nica stood her ground and I was happy for it. Surprisingly enough I was not turned off by the idea of children and for that accomplishment, I give her 3 godless stars.

Rachel says

After taking a Philosophy class based on some moral and ethical topics such as religion, abortion, etc., I found the topic of religion, and specifically Nica Lalli's views to be incredibly interesting. As being raised as "nothing", this book talks about how she views "nothing" and what her trust in humanity does for her as religion does for others.

Great read, well written, and helped me answer a few of my own questions and thoughts.

Jen Kious says

I wanted to like this book. I wanted to find explorations of how one who is "nothing" navigates in a world sometimes seemingly defined by religion. Unfortunately I was disappointed to find disjointed anecdotes with not much analysis about how these formed her views and almost NO exploration of how she really came to be convinced of her own beliefs. I think a big problem was the writing. It was just not engaging. Very much "this happened, and then this other thing happened." But the biggest reason I disliked it was because she spends so much time emphasizing that her in-laws have insulted her by thinking (and saying) that she is "wrong". But SHE THINKS THEY ARE WRONG too! If she had emphasized more that they were constantly trying to convert her that would have made more sense. But it seems she didn't ever want them to refer to religion around her or pray in front of her. I'd be so curious to hear the other side of the stories she presents - they seem so one-sided and frankly, immature. The biggest take-away you get from her is her disdain for religion and casseroles and people who like them.

Alice says

I found this book a little strange - throughout I got the feeling that the author was "nothing" (aka atheist) because her parents were "nothing", not because she really ever tried to find out her own beliefs. So many times she says "we are nothing", rather than "I am nothing". She comes around to it at the end, claiming the "we" as "my husband, kids, and I"; but I still felt like she inherited atheism rather than came to atheism through logic, research into all kinds of beliefs, or searching her own heart. It did make me think about how I've presented my beliefs to Campbell, and have tried to expose him to lots of thoughts and options. I'm glad I haven't stayed silent about it like the author's parents.

Stacey says

Nica Lalli is a good writer, and this book was a quick, interesting read. I did feel at times that she was getting too personal - a few passages felt like she was writing this whole book just to defend herself against her in-laws, and I felt embarrassed to be dragged in to a very personal, clearly ongoing feud. What this book DID do was reaffirm my religious faith - the author is proud to be nothing, and reading her affirmations made me proud to be what I am, a Christian. But boy, can I relate to her struggle with those who wanted her to convert. There are so many people out there who don't care if you believe in Jesus Christ -- they want you to convert to their church, and they don't care if you're pretty happy with the religion you follow.

Elyssa says

This memoir, which focuses on the author's upbringing, coming-of-age, and adulthood as a non-believer, was just okay. I wish she had devoted more writing to the experience of being an atheist as indicated in the title, but instead she gave equal time to a lot of random reminiscing about her life to date. The autobiographical vignettes became boring at times and I did a lot of skimming towards the end of the book.

