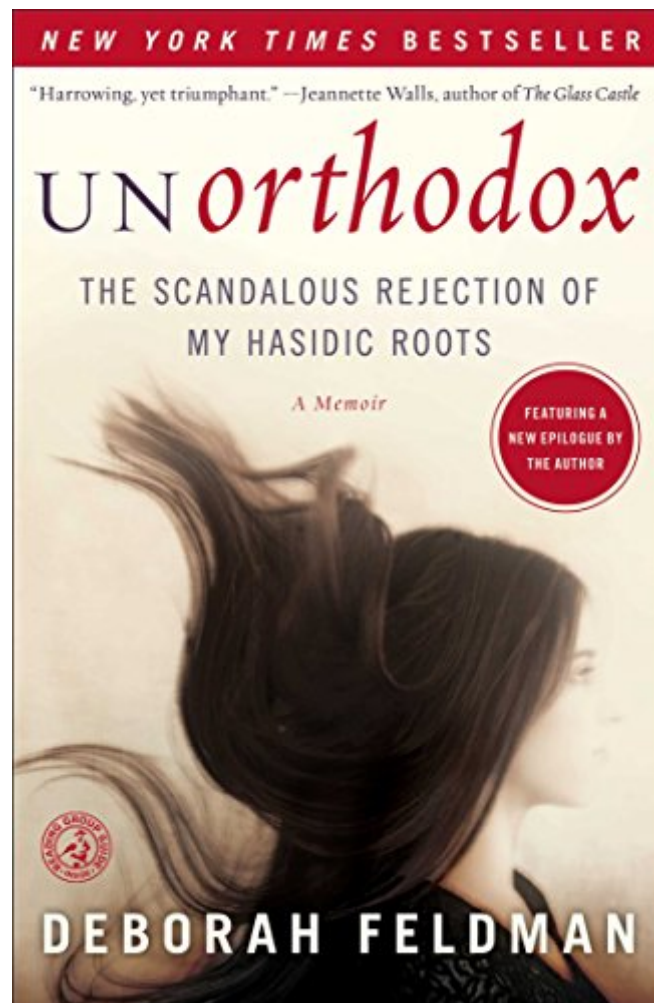




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Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection Of My Hasidic Roots



Synopsis

The instant > bestselling memoir of a young Jewish woman's escape from a religious sect, in the tradition of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's Infidel and Carolyn Jessop's Escape, featuring a new epilogue by the author. As a member of the strictly religious Satmar sect of Hasidic Judaism, Deborah Feldman grew up under a code of relentlessly enforced customs governing everything from what she could wear and to whom she could speak to what she was allowed to read. It was stolen moments spent with the empowered literary characters of Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott that helped her to imagine an alternative way of life. Trapped as a teenager in a sexually and emotionally dysfunctional marriage to a man she barely knew, the tension between Deborah's desires and her responsibilities as a good Satmar girl grew more explosive until she gave birth at nineteen and realized that, for the sake of herself and her son, she had to escape.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I had very slim idea of the faith and life of a Hassidic Jew. While not Jewish myself, I have always found the Jewish faith interesting and often sensible. I am so glad that this bight creative woman

was strong enough to search for a life that is hers and now her son will be given a life with choices. For one so young, she is very wise and brave. I really had a hard time putting the book down and it made want to do some research regarding the Hasidic culture more thoroughly, I hope this author continues her writing . She has a gift.

Autobiographical, interesting insight. Can truly say I had no idea this life was lived so close to my own. It's of course just one account - so I'd like to know the counterpoint - but I feel like this opened my eyes. I found the writing slow, laborious - particularly at first - but it picks up about two-third/through.

Overall, I enjoyed this book. I'm fascinated with accounts of women (and men) who manage to escape from extreme religious backgrounds, and Unorthodox is the first book I've read about the Hasidic community. I was very interested to read about Feldman's day-to-day life in Williamsburg, including the bizarre (to me) religious rituals and the community's treatment of women. (spoilers ahead) However, I can't rate this book 5 stars because, as others have noted, the ending is rather abrupt and unsatisfying. Unlike the other extreme religion memoirs I've read, Feldman seems to have no trouble "escaping" her oppressive community. She simply gets in the car and drives away. Even though lawyers allegedly told her she would never be able to leave the Hasidic community with her son, she seems to have no problem whatsoever. I'm sure there's much more to the story, but the book doesn't give any information about how her family reacted to her decision to leave the community or how she managed to escape with her son. Also, I don't understand where the author got her money. Deborah writes about not having enough money to buy maternity clothes or replace the worn tires on her car (which leads to a devastating accident), but she somehow has enough money to attend Sarah Lawrence --one of the most expensive, if not THE most expensive schools in the nation--and buy designer sunglasses and a Blackberry. Not to mention, renting an apartment in New York City once she goes off on her own. Where does the money come from? I get the feeling Feldman has left out A LOT of information about her escape and later years in the Hasidic community. Though it may be petty, I was also annoyed when Feldman talked about how extraordinary and remarkable she is, which was often. She probably is special, but it's still a turn off to hear someone gush about their intelligence and wit over and over again. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the book and would recommend it to other readers.

I am a reform Jew and deeply spiritual, I knew little about the Hasidic Jews. I found her story more

than eye opening and worth the read. Will recommend it to several people I know. I would like to have a hard copy to own. The only part I didn't lie, and this has happened with other Jewish books I have read, is the Yiddish. I so yearned for a dictionary at the end so I could look up phrases and words for the meanings and pronunciation. Thank you Deborah Feldman for your incredible strength andchutzpah.

As the years have gone on, I've noticed a growing difficulty reviewing books like this one. Every organization has people who do not fit in. This is true of religions whether they be Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Mormon, Scientologist (to name a few), quasi-religious organizations like scouting, the Klan, and street gangs (to name a few), or secular groups like corporations, news outlets, and political parties (to name a few). I've read books by insiders turned apostate for many of these examples and they certainly have an appeal: the insights into the workings or the organization and, of course, the gossip. But it's rare that a book in this vein can really rise above the crowd. The reason is simple: the apostate rarely has the discipline to offer both sides of the story and both sides of the story are necessary for a fair and clear picture. Unfortunately, Ms. Feldman's memoir does not rise above the crowd. I have no doubt Ms. Feldman is truthful when describing her experience. To someone who is not Hasidic or familiar with their brand of Orthodox Judaism, there are certainly things about the lifestyle that will be eye-opening: the limitations of a girl's education, the arranged marriages, the purity rituals that follow a couple into marriage, etc. However, what is also clear is that many of Ms. Feldman's troubles also stem from things that, while perhaps exacerbated by her religion, are not caused by it: a mother who abandons her, a father who is mentally challenged, difficulty in consummating her marriage. My point is that there are many people who are satisfied by the Hasidic lifestyle, and that is something that is not acknowledged here. I would not be, but how much of that is because of the prejudices of my own upbringing? I am Catholic and have no real desire to be anything else. And even though I know there are people who have been damaged by Catholicism, I still believe it to be a force of good in the lives of most people. Individual experiences vary, for reasons that are often only loosely connected to religious background. Just so, though I sympathize with Ms. Feldman, I can't take her experiences as the last word on the subject. Of course, the main interest for most readers here is the "scandal." For many, the quality of the writing is incidental; however, for me, that is also a crucial factor in my feelings about this book. In my view, the writing here rarely rises above the level of average. Her passion, particularly in the early parts of the book, when

she's relating a hurtful anecdote or reminiscing about her grandmother who raises her, is powerful and gives her prose some energy. On the other hand, her analysis and judgment of her experiences often comes across as banal. In the latter part of the book, when she has moved out of Brooklyn and is starting to plan her path to freedom, her storytelling becomes almost boring, as she seems remote both from the world she is leaving and the one she is entering. In the end, I found the experience of reading this book to be adequate but nothing special. I applaud her need to tell her story and work through some of her personal demons. On the other hand, I found her writing only intermittently powerful enough to really draw me in.

Enjoyed the book. I learned new facts about the different sects in the Hasidic community. I feel there were several things which were not addressed in the book. One is how did Ms Feldman escape from the lifestyle she always felt she didn't belong in; second, I would like to know how she ended up with her son, even though she divorced and left the sect; and third, how did she pay the college tuition? Would have been nice to read about these matters.

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