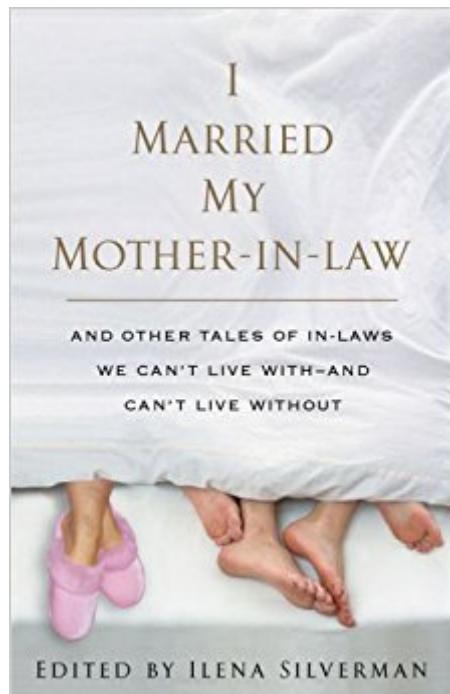


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I Married My Mother-In-Law



Synopsis

In the tradition of *The Bitch in the House*, a provocative anthology of original essays about one of life's most complicated relationships. In-laws are the family members you inherit when you choose your spouse. They're the unavoidable human baggage attached to the person you love. It's a relationship that can be traumatic, harrowing, maddening, and hilarious-sometimes all at once. In *I Married My Mother-in-Law and Other Tales of In-laws We Can't Live With-and Can't Live Without*, Ilena Silverman brings together seventeen writers who plumb their individual in-law experiences for extraordinary and unexpected wisdom about this uninvited and intense relationship. We hear from a variety of writers, including Michael Chabon, who writes movingly about what he learned from his ex-wife's father; Kathryn Harrison, whose relationship with her father-in-law was more rewarding and less complicated than the one she had with her own father; Martha McPhee, who explores the role that money plays in the in-law dynamic; Susan Straight, who recounts her experience as the first white woman who married into her husband's African-American family; and Ayelet Waldman, who ponders the competition between wives and mothers for the attention of their husbands/sons. By turns blunt and poignant, horrifying and touching, these essays are small mirrors that reflect some of the myriad aspects of this bewildering and complex relationship. Remarkable for both the quality of its prose and the scope of its emotional insight, *I Married My Mother-in-Law* is an unforgettable anthology about an inescapable family relationship. Contributors: Matt Bai Amy Bloom Michael Chabon Ta-Nehisi Coates Anthony Giardina Jonathan Goldstein Colin Harrison Kathryn Harrison Barbara Jones Tom Junod Karen Karbo Martha McPhee Peter Richmond Dani Shapiro Darcey Steinke Susan Straight Ayelet Waldman

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Customer Reviews

In spite of its funny title and occasional humor, this anthology of in-law stories is quite serious. For every gleeful in-law basher (e.g., Ayelet Waldman, acknowledging what a bad mother-in-law she intends to be; and Amy Bloom, cheerfully explaining why she hates her partner's parents), there's a strong representation of in-law lovers. There's Martha McPhee, who wishes hers hadn't died before she'd known them; Peter Richmond, who came to know his wife better by knowing her mother; and Barbara Jones, who realized her tyrannical father-in-law regretted his poor parenting and was actually a devoted grandfather. For many, having in-laws from another culture—Jewish, Japanese, African-American—is unexpectedly rewarding. In-laws often don't respect boundaries, but sometimes they're beloved precisely because they're emotional and overinvolved—people can be attracted to the parents they never had. Indeed, some in-laws become dear in spite of the trouble they cause, as in Colin Harrison's luminous account of caring for wife Kathryn's grandmother. While there's a lot of death in this collection—people seem to experience in-laws mostly in their passing—there's wit, wisdom and great writing, too. (Jan.)

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Ilena Silverman is a story editor at The New York Times Magazine. She worked previously at GQ and Harper's magazines and is the co-editor of *What Counts: The Complete Harper's Index*.

I grabbed this book simply by the title alone. It sounded good at the time and it was a very quick read but ... it's not the best collection of essays I have ever read. Don't get me wrong ~~ it's a good book and for people who like to read this type of books, it is really a good series of writing. The title itself is misleading, even though the first essay does mention that writer did marry his mother-in-law by way of her daughter. There are a variety of stories. Some hated their in-laws (Dead, Thank God by Amy Bloom), some longed for their in-laws (Longing for In-Laws by Martha McPhee), some divorced their spouses but still remained close to their in-laws, while others discovered a streak of cruelty in theirs. My personal favorite essay in this entire book is Keeping Vigil by Kathryn Harris. I actually cried because she wrote of her two-month long vigil at her father-in-law's beside as he fought cancer to the end. It was written realistically (she had fights with her husband during that time, kids were aware something was going on but didn't know what it was till one night their dad, her husband exploded in anger and told them the truth, flying back and forth to Washington D.C. to

the sick man's bedside, reminiscing over the years as being his daughter-in-law ~~ it reminds me of how families can get together and stay together in spite of the reality of death). The other essays were written well, but they didn't move me as much. Maybe it was a case of me being a reader who wants to connect with other writers on the messy issues of family and in-laws and all that. If you like essays, this book should satisfy that craving. However, instead of spending your money on it, borrow a copy from the library ~~ it might suit you or it might not. 12-2-07

This is a series of essays/short stories about people trying to adapt to their in-laws, people who find their in-laws to be more compatible than blood relatives, people who end up being disowned by in-laws once the marriage is over. It's a mixed bag and some of the stories are excellent--the characters come alive for us and startle us with their humanity, eccentricity, and just plain meanness. Others I found to be tedious reading. I enjoyed the stories which gave specific examples and quotes from the people involved. The articles which were more like essays with long paragraphs describing characters and personalities were not as interesting, for me anyway. There was one woman whose in-laws were deceased, and she spent the whole article speculating on what they might have been like, even to the point of examining objects left in a car. This was an attempt to make a story out of next to nothing. This book is worth it because some of the stories are fascinating and could even make a person feel better about his/her own family or in-laws.

I picked up this anthology yesterday and I was unable to stop until Tom Junod's last sentence. Those final words "...of becoming something like her son" read a little smeary because I was crying, for the tenth or eleventh time, not even stopping to wipe the tears away. I can't begin to tell you how captivating, moving, illuminating--all those blurb words that seem so inadequate--this book was. I felt as if I had been invited to a dinner party where the host suggested a parlor game that at first seems frivolous, but as each guest tells their story, grows increasingly poignant, serious and epic. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

What a terrific compilation. Great writing, great stories. Moving, touching, teaching stories. Thank you to these authors who shared their lives, their thoughts and feelings. Only thing I didn't like is the title. Can't believe they couldn't come up with a better one to capture the essence of this book, these people's stories. Love or hate your in-laws, doesn't matter--this book is for you. It might make you call up your mother-in-law! :)

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