



Half-Jew

By Susan Jacoby

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Since childhood, Susan Jacoby, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Age of American Unreason*, was sure that her father was keeping a secret. At age twenty, just before beginning her writing career as a reporter for the *Washington Post*, she learned the truth: Robert Jacoby, a Catholic convert with a Catholic wife, was also a Jew.

In *Half-Jew*, Jacoby grapples with the hidden identity cloaked by the persona of a successful accountant and member of St. Thomas Aquinas Church in East Lansing, Michigan—and with the secrets and lies that had marked her family's history for three generations on two continents.

Beginning in 1849 when her great-grandfather arrived in America as a political refugee, Jacoby traces her lineage through the lives of her great-uncle Harold, the distinguished astronomer whose map of the constellations is etched on the ceiling of Grand Central Terminal; her uncle, the bridge champion Oswald Jacoby, her aunt Edith, also a Catholic convert and eventually a reformer within the church; and, of course her father himself. At the core of story is the psychic damage that accrues across generations when people conceal their true ethnic and religious origins.

Featuring a new afterword, *Half-Jew* is a meticulously researched, emotionally poignant examination of the dark legacy of European and American anti-Semitism as well as a tender-hearted account of a daughter coming to understand her father, herself, and her family's true legacy.

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Half-Jew By Susan Jacoby Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1800661 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-03-15
- Released on: 2016-03-15
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this poignant mix of family history and memoir, journalist Jacoby (*Wild Justice*) unravels the thick fabric of lies that her father, Robert, wove around his past. Raised in a happy Catholic home, Jacoby was in her early 20s when she learned that Robert had been born a Jew. Her surprise intensified when she found out that Robert's brother and sister had also married Catholics and converted. What, she wondered, had caused such a dramatic rupture in the family's history? What emerges from Jacoby's research is not only an account of family estrangement and denial but a social history of anti-Semitism and Jewish acculturation in the U.S. over the last century and a half, beginning with the arrival of the author's German-Jewish great-grandfather in the mid 19th century. Jacoby presents some finely crafted portraits: her grandfather Oswald, a brilliant young lawyer whose career dissolved under the pressure of a gambling addiction; Edith, Oswald's chilly, critical wife; Oswald's brother, Harold, a noted astronomer at Columbia University; Uncle Ozzie, Robert's brother, an admittedly self-centered world-class bridge champion; and Robert himself, a loving father who nevertheless almost ruined his family with his own gambling problem. Jacoby tells how Robert was taunted as a "baby Jew-boy" during his years in a Brooklyn public school and of the two years he spent at Dartmouth at a time when the admissions director believed the college had too many of "the chosen and the heathen." Jacoby's intelligent and compassionate probing extends to her own prolonged process of learning to accept herself as a "half-Jew." This is a moving tribute to her father and a vivid portrait of one family's attempt to find its place in America. Agents, Georges and Anne Borchardt. (May)

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From Library Journal

A noted journalist uncovers her Jewish roots.

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From [Booklist](#)

Jacoby began to explore her father's life after his death in 1986, and what emerged was the painful story of a German-Jewish-American family that attempted to hide its origins by converting to Catholicism. Her father grew up in a family dedicated to hiding its Jewish past. Her father, his older brother, and his sister all married Irish Catholics, converted to their spouses' religion, and "did everything possible to prevent their children from learning anything about the family's real history." Jacoby's father moved to Michigan from New York in the 1950s. She was raised as a Catholic and educated in parochial elementary schools. Jacoby traces her family history back to her great-grandfather, who was born in 1831. In her book she attempts to understand what was gained and what was lost by the Jacobys' long, concerted effort to transform themselves into gentiles. Jacoby, a former reporter for the *Washington Post* and author of *Wild Justice: The Evolution of Revenge*, has written a compassionate and articulate memoir of denial and reconciliation. *George Cohen*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marcy Ontiveros:

The book Half-Jew can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. Exactly why must we leave the best thing like a book Half-Jew? A number of you have a different opinion about book. But one aim this book can give many info for us. It is absolutely appropriate. Right now, try to closer with your book.

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Harry Cofield:

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