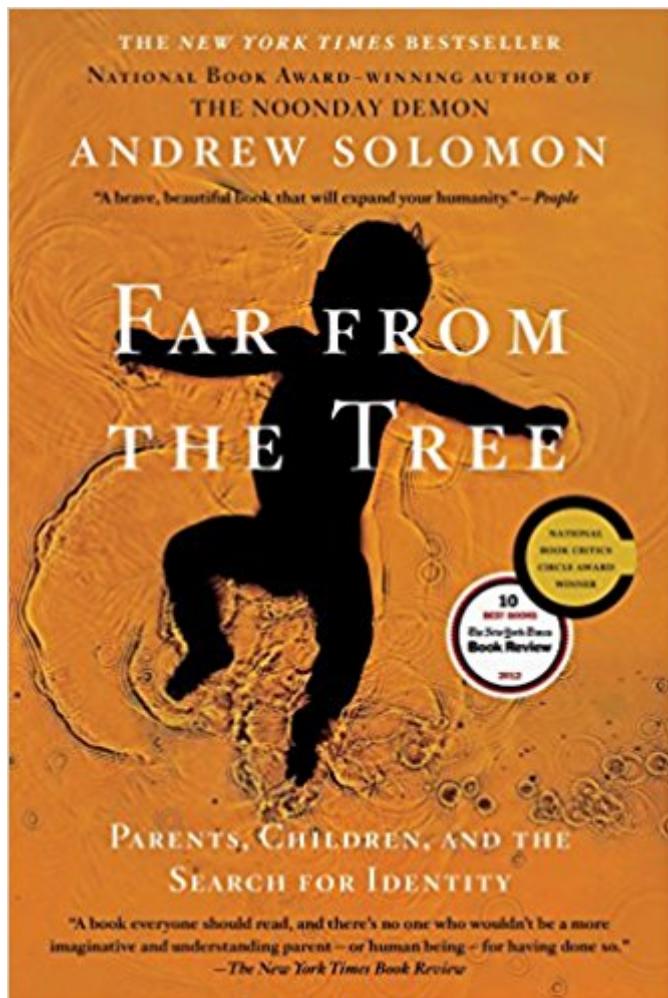


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Far From The Tree: Parents, Children And The Search For Identity



Synopsis

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, a Books for a Better Life Award, and one of The New York Times Book Review's Ten Best Books of 2012, this masterpiece by the National Book Award-winning author of *The Noonday Demon* features stories of parents who not only learn to deal with their exceptional children, but also find profound meaning in doing so. A *brave, beautiful book that will expand your humanity* (People). Solomon's startling proposition is that being exceptional is at the core of the human condition: "that difference is what unites us. He writes about families coping with deafness, dwarfism, Down syndrome, autism, schizophrenia, or multiple severe disabilities; with children who are prodigies, who are conceived in rape, who become criminals, who are transgender. While each of these characteristics is potentially isolating, the experience of difference within families is universal, and Solomon documents triumphs of love over prejudice in every chapter. All parenting turns on a crucial question: to what extent should parents accept their children for who they are, and to what extent they should help them become their best selves. Drawing on ten years of research and interviews with more than three hundred families, Solomon mines the eloquence of ordinary people facing extreme challenges. Elegantly reported by a spectacularly original and compassionate thinker, this book explores how people who love each other must struggle to accept each other—a theme in every family's life.

Book Information

Paperback: 976 pages

Publisher: Scribner; Reprint edition (October 1, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0743236726

ISBN-13: 978-0743236720

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (737 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #5,863 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Disabled #18 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Special Needs #87 in Books > Medical Books > Psychology > General

Customer Reviews

Far From the Tree is a TOME. I mean, it's a great big, heavy book in every sense of the word. To be honest, I was a little intimidated when my copy arrived! I didn't read it cover to cover, but started

with the autism chapter because it was relevant to our family. I found it to be a very well-researched, sensitive look at how autism can affect a parent's life, hopes, and perceptions. That chapter was so good, I moved to the crime chapter and stayed up way too late because I could not put it down. Thank you, Mr. Solomon for pointing out the absurdities in our justice system when it comes to dealing with juvenile crime. (And as for the reviewer who questioned including crime at all, this book focuses on any possible way that a child can turn out different than their parents expected, and being guilty of a crime definitely seems appropriate to me.) I learned a lot from this chapter, and was particularly fascinated by the Klebolds' story. Once again, Solomon wrote with sensitivity about a very difficult and controversial topic. From there I read the chapter on dwarfism, and then finally turned to the first pages of the book and started reading the beginning! I wanted to learn about how families deal with a diagnosis of autism; instead I learned about how families deal with all kinds of unexpected outcomes, how resilient parents can be when faced with hardships, and how connected are the identities of parents and their children. As a parent, I understand the constant struggle to balance who we want our children to be and who they actually are. "There is no such thing as reproduction" may be my new mantra. One more thing: in 700 pages (okay, I admit, I didn't read the Acknowledgments) I never found an example of "martyrdom" that one reviewer complained about.

Everyone will be talking about this book and everyone should. Mr. Solomon's deeply personal narration and vivid story-telling combine with extensive factual scholarship to make compelling reading out of topics you might otherwise expect to find repugnant or marginal. Full disclosure: I read an early draft and have been waiting ever since for others to have this chance to expand their hearts by reading it, too. The book offers a world of information on particular conditions; it ponders the wider implications of choice and identity for both the parents and the children dealing with dwarfism, deafness, criminality, etc. And just as learning you are not alone with a special gift or disability can be liberating for an individual person, so learning that other families are dealing with the same conditions can give heart to parents who feel isolated. Moreover, those who have had to focus on one particular condition will be led to see wider commonalities. All of us know someone who is profoundly different from their parents. And because Mr. Solomon brings coherence to the book by thinking across conditions, he implicitly opens the way for thinking about analogous conditions not specifically covered. What is most deeply moving is Mr. Solomon's ability to portray each individual as a unique person. The book is full of voices and stories, a reminder that we are all always surrounded by people who are like us, different from us, and challenged in ways we've never thought of before. Together, they are sobering reminders of how deep the pain of the human

condition can be, but also sources of inspiration and hope. Mr. Solomon is never dogmatic.

Andrew Solomon has turned upside down the adage, "An apple doesn't fall far from the tree" in his exploration of a panoply of conditions that may sometimes distance children from their parents. The range of these situations is broad and often quite unrelated, but this theme of family dissonance and adaptation to that dissonance ties the book together in most aspects. While I can definitely recommend the book to many audiences, I did vacillate over whether to give it three or four stars. In the end, I have chosen to round down rather than up. My reasoning: Pros: Solomon's research is solid and thorough and generally avoids the kind of "professionalese" that can sometimes infect scholastic writing of this nature. He has combined discussion of current scientific literature with extensive personal stories of families, and his accounts of these situations shows a real care for the people he has interviewed and spent hours and days and weeks with. Solomon has included some situations many of us may not want to acknowledge or that may not even have crossed our radar as being problems for parents. We see stories of conventions of dwarfs or see a video clip of a child prodigy or read a news account of a juvenile crime spree or have our heartstrings tugged by Facebook entries about a Downs child named prom king, and we may not think of the parental struggles behind each of these diverse situations. Almost a dozen different challenges are presented chapter by chapter, giving us an opportunity to better understand how situations that are "not normal" tax even the most caring parents. Each chapter stands almost alone in the coverage of a challenging parenting issue.

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