

## More Than a Mom: Living a Full and Balanced Life When Your Child Has Special Needs

Amy Baskin and Heather Fawcett.  
Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House, 2006.

### Reviewed by Theresa Nowlan Suart

Mothers of children with special needs are often overwhelmed by the day-to-day essential tasks (both large and small) of managing their child's condition, to the point of neglecting themselves, their partners, and their typically-developing children. As authors Amy Baskin and Heather Fawcett point out, "extraordinary parenting responsibilities can create extraordinary pressures" (4).

*More than a Mom* offers practical information and support in down-to-earth, conversational prose. Advice, conveyed in a friendly style, gives mothers permission to have a life separate from their role as "mom with a child with special needs" and guides them toward independence.

The authors state at the outset, their book "isn't just about 'coping with' or 'adapting to' the heavier parenting demands" of mothering a child with special needs. Instead, the work is "about helping you thrive, be happy, and carve out a fulfilling life for yourself" (5). This fulfilling life could include finding time to get together with friends, pursue a hobby, and achieve work-life balance—things mothers of typically-developing children also struggle to achieve, without the added responsibility of caring for a child with special needs.

The authors—one has a child with autism, the other a child with Asperger's syndrome—augment their personal experiences with information from over five hundred mothers from Canada and the United States and with current research from multiple sources. They cast their special needs net wide: rather than focusing on a single special needs population, the authors include first-hand experiences from mothers whose children have a wide variety of disorders and conditions including Angelman syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, muscular dystrophy, vision and hearing problems, learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, developmental delays, and medically fragile conditions. While both authors are Canadian and reside in Ontario—Baskin lives in Guelph and Fawcett in Ottawa—they cite American terminology and focus on American programs, with parenthetical Canadian references.

Thirty chapters are divided into seven parts: Welcome to Our World; Taking Care of Yourself; Daily Life Reality Check; Family Ties; Overcoming Barriers to Quality Care; Career and Home; and Redefining your Work Life. Part eight features five appendices and is followed by a resource list, related readings, research references, and a comprehensive index. While there is little new here in terms of mother-self-care advice, the book's focus on women whose

children have special needs makes it a useful resource.

In fact, this book includes too much information. At nearly five hundred pages, it may be daunting for a woman with little spare time. Each chapter, however, is brief and can be read quickly—ideal for the mother of a special needs child who is practiced in the “grazing” style of reading. A future edition could benefit from an improved layout that would lend itself more readily to scanning.

*More Than a Mom* is a well-researched, in-depth handbook for any mother facing the particular challenges and demands of raising a child with special needs.

## **Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief**

Evelyn Burns Robinson.

Christies Beach, South Australia: Clova Publications, 2000.

### **Reviewed by Ruth Nemzoff**

The first part of *Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief* reads like a novel and should be required reading for anyone thinking of relinquishing a child through adoption, adoptive parents, and legislators. Robinson’s account of her impregnation by what is now known as date rape, her subsequent pregnancy, relinquishment of her child, and lifelong agony should convince readers that adoption is always a profoundly difficult and life-altering decision.

The author’s experience is typical of so many young women who were told they “would never think about ... [the] baby again.” Robinson did not have any warm feelings for the man who impregnated her, she did not want to have a child, and yet she suffered enormously from the trauma of birthing and giving up her child. Her story firmly rebuts the argument that the birth mother will forget her baby.

The second part of the book I find troubling. Robinson argues convincingly that both the adopted child and birth mother have a right to know of each other’s identity. I agree that it is a travesty of justice and human rights to obliterate birth certificates and pretend that birth parents never existed. Every child deserves the right to know his or her origins. However, Robinson mitigates the validity and power of her arguments by suggesting her own experience is characteristic of most adoptive situations. For example, she states that “some adopters allow themselves to think that the children they were adopting were unloved and unwanted and that they were doing not only the children but also society a favour by providing them with a home and a family . . . in most cases, we know from biological mothers, and to some extent fathers, that the