

Shunned: How I Lost My Religion and Found Myself

Linda A. Curtis

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Linda A. Curtis's memoir captures a religious family grappling with the aftermath of one of their own questioning her faith and choosing a new path. *Shunned* is about family, self-discovery, and spirituality; it explores the consequences of rigid belief systems. From memories of unexpectedly preaching about her Jehovah's Witness faith to a coworker to her long journey through changing her marriage, her location, and her work, Curtis weaves her tale of losing her religion and finding herself.

Great attention is given to the people and places that impacted her choice, and references to Jehovah's Witness teachings and structures provide context. Curtis thoroughly examines what the Jehovah's Witness faith meant to her specifically, along with capturing the personal changes that made it possible to leave and seek spirituality and meaning elsewhere.

Dialogue and scenes of interactions between Curtis and her family are raw and truthful, especially when each of the family members is shown to have been touched by doubt in the past themselves. Curtis captures her own introspection in a clear-eyed way, honest without coming across as callous to the concerns of her family and friends.

The narrative includes focus on business successes that seem unconnected to the spiritual journey, though some of her interactions in such scenes help to develop a full sense of who Curtis is, and how she meaningfully changes as she gains working experience.

The book's ending is heartbreaking, and its epilogue even more so, but balance is maintained; at no point does the text become needlessly morose or overly hopeful. Curtis's story reads as true to life, full of identifiable lessons, pain, and positives.

Shunned addresses universal themes of belonging, connection, meaning, and family togetherness; it will resonate across faith lines.

LAURA LEAVITT (March/April 2018)

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