



The Girlfriend Mom

Dani Alpert

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The Girlfriend Mom is a laugh-filled memoir about growing through the imperfect experiences of joining with a family.

Dani Alpert's darkly funny memoir *The Girlfriend Mom* is about forging a relationship with her divorced boyfriend's children.

Alpert was a fierce, independent, childless New Yorker when she was forced to come to terms with her red-hot Portuguese lover's obligations to his two children. The implications included weekend visits that invaded her passionate love nest, awkward hand offs with her partner's ex-wife, and being responsible (yet not) for protecting and shaping the lives of young people.

Soon Alpert figures out that she's lost not only her heart, but control of her life. Her efforts to adjust to on-again, off-again family life take over: as soon as she grows accustomed to having kids around, it's time to return to a child-free state. She struggles to set boundaries, ricocheting between feeling self-centered and powerless in a family drama that impacts her, too. She works to balance her needs with those of the people around her. Shifting loyalties and social pressures abound, even after the couple breaks up. She faces her own hang-ups, biases, and norms to embrace the young children in her life, regardless of her official standing.

Narrated with honesty and wit, the book airs grievances and frustrations with nuance, flair, and comedic sensibilities. In one scene, Alpert gets lost in the rain with a full bladder; in another, she secures a scarce ticket to a graduation that she's not even sure she's invited to attend. Her doubts are voiced in a compelling way, and the comedy of awkward moments is emphasized, as when her boyfriend's son steals her dildo.

Biting humor also arises in Alpert's anecdotes about time spent with the children, as with a reluctant visit to a flea market with her boyfriend's son: "I zipped up my hazmat suit and lowered my gas mask, and we piled into the car." Astute observations and juxtapositions enliven scenes further, as with a joke about her overprotective reaction to the boy's obsession with a switchblade: "I imagined him mangling his fingers he'd never be able to play the violin," though really, "he didn't play the violin or have any interest in learning" anyway.

Song lyrics open each chapter to set the tone; the book's catchy chapter titles are complementary. Each person in Alpert's story is made multidimensional, evincing a deep understanding of human foibles and compassion for others. Uncertainty and heartbreak are imparted in an unflinching manner, resulting in satisfying, bittersweet lessons.

The Girlfriend Mom is a memoir about growing through imperfect experiences, with plenty of laughs along the way.

WENDY HINMAN (April 24, 2020)

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