

The Opposite of Comfortable

Sharon Nir

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For women at a crossroads, this memoir provides an alternative to polarizing discussions on careerism and mothering.

Work-life balance is a myth for many women and mothers. In Sharon Nir's memoir, *The Opposite of Comfortable*, the Israeli systems analyst is troubled until she discovers that giving up a career for family does not mean losing ambition. Themes of immigration, relationships, and reinvention filter through a practical, business-minded perspective in this inspiring reflection on female identity.

The memoir begins shortly before Nir's husband is offered a two-year fellowship at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York on a non-immigrant visa that requires its holders to leave the United States once it expires. Chapters detail the author's decision to step down from her position for the temporary move, the family's arrival in New York a few months before 9/11, the isolating depression she endures while caring for her son, a return to Jerusalem, and the family's gradual decision to immigrate permanently. Throughout, the author presents a shift in her thinking, from believing that feminism meant breaking out of traditional roles to accepting that all choices deserve support.

For a former, self-described "careeraholic," the move to New York sets off an awakening. Here, the loss of a vibrant existence outside of the home is an opportunity to change directions and to inhabit the idea of blooming where one is planted. An emphasis on continual growth and rich hindsight allow Nir to avoid viewing uncomfortable moments as obstacles. Scenes that aptly demonstrate this belief include the start of her business venture providing healthy lunch deliveries to daycare centers in Manhattan; trips to gardens and museums, which allow her to find respite in a new environment; and her resourceful advocacy in finding her dyslexic son an appropriate education.

Everyday events are complicated by terrorist acts in the United States and in Israel, which serve to underscore the importance of maintaining strong bonds. Time and again *The Opposite of Comfortable* demonstrates how shifting circumstances require not only resilience, but a frame of mind that allows one to set aside individual desires in favor of supporting the family as a whole.

On occasion the graceful, engaging writing falters. Remembered conversations between friends who offer advice come across as deliberate rather than natural, spontaneous exchanges. Lengthy passages that describe the author's work as a content development manager depict a sense of accomplishment, yet weigh on the narrative with technical explanations. Most of the work remains streamlined, well-edited and laced with everyday candor that still takes a dignified approach when it comes to describing emotional tensions between loved ones.

For women at a crossroads, this cosmopolitan, welcome voice provides an alternative to polarizing discussions on careerism and mothering.

KAREN RIGBY (April 13, 2016)

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