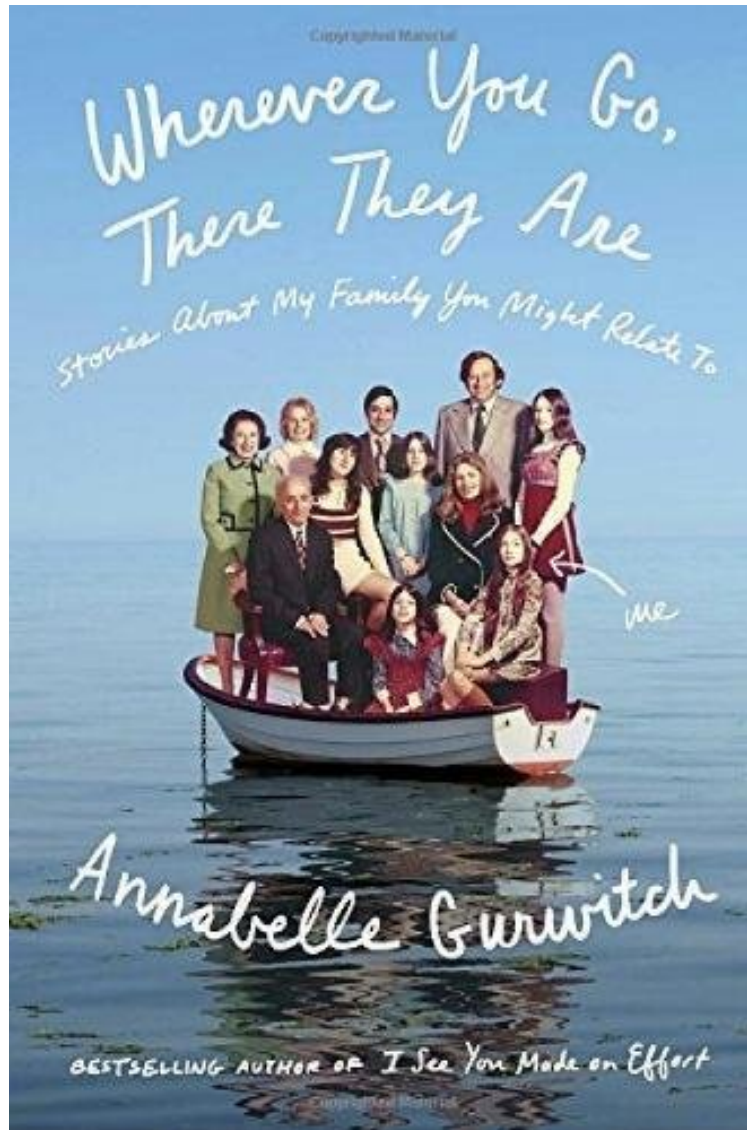


(Download pdf ebook) Wherever You Go, There They Are: Stories About My Family You Might Relate To

## Wherever You Go, There They Are: Stories About My Family You Might Relate To

Annabelle Gurwitch

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#306694 in Books Gurwitch Annabelle 2017-04-18 2017-04-18 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.25 x 1.06 x 6.251, 1.14 #File Name: 0399574883320 pages Wherever You Go There They Are Stories about My Family You Might Relate to | File size: 46.Mb

**Annabelle Gurwitch : Wherever You Go, There They Are: Stories About My Family You Might Relate To** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wherever You Go, There They Are: Stories About My Family You Might Relate To:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. This book is brilliant, laugh out loud By k. kashyap This book is

brilliant, laugh out loud and hard to put down. Reading it was like having a conversation with that friend of yours who has the oldest, weirdest soul and the quickest, funniest wit who's also cool and up with her s\*\*\* and can - truly - impart great wisdom on the way you see your own family. I loved it. Also, I'm obsessed with families and I love that this book's thesis is all about re-configuring that. Highly recommended. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Funny, touching, and smart. By J. Brown This book manages to be both hilarious and incredibly touching. I loved the way Gurwitch writes so insightfully about so many kinds of families. I've read several of Gurwitch's books at this point and she's always so funny and intelligent and original, and this book is no exception. Highly recommended. 9 of 11 people found the following review helpful. there they are, all the time, whether you want them there or not. By Jill Nicely Have you had a parent who withheld the fact that you inherited part of an island until that island is getting pummeled by a hurricane? Do you have ancestors who supplied sugar to moonshiners or who ran a brothel? Have you ever told your son that the cat is actually his younger sister whose cat costume zipper got stuck and then overgrown with hair? If you have, then you must be Annabelle Gurwitch. The actor, writer, comedian, and former cohost of TBS's *Dinner and Movie* is back with a book of personal essays that take a skewering look at one of the things we all laugh and cry about: family. While regaling us with stories of her own families and tribes (ie theatre people), she also brings us back to our own homes to consider the love and laughs under our own roof. *Wherever You Go, There They Are* is a laugh-out-loud punch in the gut of everything that is best and most frustrating about those we are closest to. Annabelle Gurwitch's honest, revealing personal memories make this story collection a down-to-earth, warm, wonderful, moving, funny celebration of family, of those who came before to lead the way and those who follow us around asking for food, binkies, money, and the car keys. A little bit Nora Ephron, a little bit Mary Roach, Gurwitch's humor makes you feel like you're sitting and listening to a good friend over coffee or cocktails. Her openness is compelling, her authenticity is magnetic, and reading her book just makes you feel good. *Wherever You Go, There You Are* has helped remind me of my love for good female humor writing, instilled in me when I raided my own mother's bookshelf when I was a kid and first discovered Erma Bombeck. And just in case you wondered, Moo Goo Gai Pan was a swashbuckling pirate with adventures that rival any comic book superhero. At least, that's what Annabelle's dad says.

A hysterically funny and slyly insightful new collection of essays from New York Times bestselling author Annabelle Gurwitch, about her own family of scam artists and hucksters, as well as the sisterhoods, temporary tribes, communities, and cults who have become surrogates along the way. When Annabelle Gurwitch was a child, surrounded by a cast of epically dysfunctional relatives, she secretly prayed that it was all a terrible mistake. Maybe she was a long-lost daughter of Joni Mitchell or the reincarnation of an ancient Egyptian princess. A family of bootleggers, gamblers, and philanderers, the Gurwitches have always been a bit vague on the ideal of a loving and supportive family. Their definition includes people you can count on to borrow money from, hold a grudge against, or blackmail. Thus began a lifetime of Annabelle seeking out surrogates. If she's learned anything, it's that no matter how hard you try to escape a crazy family, you just end up in another crazy family. With a wry wit and healthy dose of irresistible self-deprecation, Gurwitch asks: Who and what makes a family in our modern society? Is it our blood relations, the people we work with, the people we pray with, our pets? Gurwitch delves into her Shalom Y'all tribe's southern Jewish roots, along with the confederacies she's joined by accident or on purpose, and treats us to a glimpse of life with theater folk, a band of cosplaying Furies, pet people, a UFO cult, and secular humanist fellowships while exploring the fragility of sisterhood and the spectacularly daunting search for the community where her aging parents will spend the last chapter of their lives. By turns hilarious and deeply moving, *Wherever You Go, There They Are* is a must-read for anyone who's even occasionally been frustrated by the people they share carbohydrate-laden meals with every year.

"A smart, edgy writer...As a memoirist, Gurwitch succeeds by evoking emotions that cut to the core of our humanity, and giving us laughs along the way." —Mort Zachter, *Los Angeles of Books* "A vivacious confessional... The memoir's madcap joy is the entire Gurwitch clan of scenery chews...With her moonshine-smuggling forebears and her brothel matron great-grandmother, Gurwitch joins the shell-shocked ranks of dysfunctional-family chroniclers Augusten Burroughs and Sean Wilsey." —Natalie Beach, *O Magazine* "Sagacious wit and soulful insights with a dash of Nora Ephron." —Cynthia Romanowski, *Coast Magazine* "Once I started *Wherever You Go, There They Are*, I couldn't put it down. This book is hysterically, laugh-out-loud funny—take it on an airplane and be prepared to enjoy your flight." —Judy Greer, actress and author of *I Don't Know What You Know Me From* "I love spending time under the spell of Annabelle Gurwitch, who lived all these crackpot adventures so we don't have to. Her unforgettable stories about family and other disasters remind us how insane this world can be, and how necessary our laughter." —Sarah Hepola, author of *Blackout: Remembering the Things I Drank to Forget* "I had to invent a word to describe this book. It's 'Luffaw': a guffaw with a poignant 'awww' as well. You'll relate to Annabelle Gurwitch's stories about finding your people and working with the ones you were given." —Jen Kirkman, author of *I Can Barely Take Care of Myself* "Annabelle Gurwitch takes a sharp-eyed, un-fool-able, and hilarious look at her family's loopy

pursuit of the American Dream in *Wherever You Go, There They Are*. Wherever she goes, you'll want to follow her!" —Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickel and Dimed* "Annabelle Gurwitch's book is really funny. That is, when you aren't choking up, you'll be laughing. Her parents are lovably infuriating and her travels among atheists, secular humanists, and new-agey summer campers are not only hysterical, but important, and a reminder that family is where you find it." —Julia Sweeney, author of *If It's Not One Thing It's Your Mother and God Said Ha!* "Annabelle Gurwitch picks up the mantles of Nora Ephron and David Sedaris with unapologetic irreverence and lovably brutal self-deprecation. As she ponders why families are so impossible to escape, you'll want to hold your own crazy loved ones closer and perhaps—like Annabelle—even consider breastfeeding your cat." —Faith Salie, author of *Approval Junkie* "In *Wherever You Go, There They Are* Annabelle Gurwitch takes inspiration from her own life to examine that most horrible of all human conditions: family. She makes a compelling case for community, while arguing for a definition that eschews tribalism. This hilarious and insightful book reminds me why I'm so, so happy that I didn't have children!" —Bill Maher "Reading Annabelle Gurwitch feels like staying up all night in a freewheeling conversation with my funniest, wisest, most magnetic friend. *Wherever You Go, There They Are* is required remedy for everyone desperate for a good, hard laugh at the vexing, heart-swelling madness we call family." —Maria Semple, author of *Today Will Be Different* and *Where'd You Go, Bernadette?* "Annabelle Gurwitch tackles every life passage, epic or trivial, with a courageous wit that makes even the darkest moments more bearable. *Wherever You Go, There They Are* hilariously explores the frustrations, catastrophes, and unforgettable thrills of navigating life with that gaggle of lunatics known as family." —Heather Havrilesky, author of *How to Be a Person in the World* and *Disaster Preparedness* "Annabelle Gurwitch claims to be related to her nutty family, but I suspect she's really the secret love child of Nora Ephron and Groucho Marx. She's an old-fashioned wit for the post-modern age, a curmudgeon with a deep well of empathy and a genuinely good soul. I'm so glad she's back with another book." —Meghan Daum, author of *The Unspeakable* About the Author Annabelle Gurwitch is an actress and the author of *I See You Made an Effort* (a New York Times bestseller and Thurber Prize finalist); *You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up* (coauthored with Jeff Kahn); and *Fired!* (which was also a Showtime Comedy Special). Gurwitch gained a loyal following during her stint cohosting *Dinner and a Movie* on TBS and years as a regular commentator on NPR. She's written for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Hollywood Reporter*. Gurwitch was the news anchor on HBO's *Not Necessarily the News* and hosted *WASTED* on Planet Green network. Her acting credits include *Seinfeld*, *Boston Legal*, *Dexter*, and *Melvin Goes to Dinner*. A veteran of many lauded and even more misguided theatrical productions, she regularly performs at arts centers around the country. Gurwitch is a Jewish mother, a reluctant atheist, and an ardent environmentalist. She is empty nesting in Los Angeles. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.\*\*\*This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected copy proof\*\*\* Copyright © 2017 Annabelle Gurwitch

Moo Goo Gai Pan was a swashbuckling adventurer who sailed the seven seas carousing and plundering and generally yo-ho-ho-ing it up. At least, that was Pan's MO according to my father, Harry Gurwitch. If my dad has one talent, it's the ability to spin a yarn. Pan and his exploits were our bedtime stories during the six or so months in 1967 that our family crashed at my aunt Gloria's home in Wilmington, Delaware. I was in kindergarten and had just gotten the hang of buttoning myself into my Wright School for Girls pinafore when my parents packed up Mom's wood-paneled Chevy Caprice station wagon and drove north from Mobile to Wilmington. We arrived with only the suitcases that fit in the car. We pulled up to the house and my mother took to her bed in a nylon peignoir set. It wasn't actually her bed, it was the twin bed with a Snoopy comforter in my cousin Shari's bedroom, and she didn't emerge again for several months. Shirley Gurwitch was "in mourning for her life," to borrow from Chekhov. Aunt Gloria and Uncle Jack folded my sister and me into their brood. My maternal grandmother, Frances, slipped money to Gloria and Jack every week to feed and clothe us. My mother says she still has PTSD from the trauma of having to move back home and in with her sister. My mother had big little-girl dreams. Her childhood diaries hint at a desire to become an actress, an aspiration that she was too shy to pursue and would not have been well received by her parents.\* Whereas my father's family was colorful and risk taking, my mother's was unassuming and hardworking. Frances wanted to go into nursing, but only the boys in her family got educations and she ended up a clerk in the county welfare department. Her father, Johnny Maisel, was a movie projectionist. The work was anything but glamorous. The profession attracted taciturn loners who were strong enough to manipulate the heavy machinery and handy with electrical appliances. Johnny so rarely spoke, in fact, that no one realized he had Alzheimer's until we started getting phone calls from strangers in Baltimore after he'd gone out to get bread and milk in Wilmington. My mother loved dreaming the day away in the cool darkness of the movie theater, but she only once worked up the courage to audition for a play. "Dinner is served," she unmemorably announced as Tweeny, a junior domestic worker, in her high school production\* of the equally forgettable British comedy *The Admirable Crichton*. It was her debut and swan song. • Even when I found regular work on a soap opera, Frances continued to send letters urging me to keep up my typing skills. (I neglected to tell her I had cheated my way through typing in high school.) I recently had lunch with Muriel, who looked up to my mother, her slightly older cousin, when they were undergraduates at the University of Delaware. "Your mother was pretty and studious and I wanted to be just like her. She gave me her copy of *Catcher in the Rye*." Muriel became a science and engineering professor at MIT, but by then, my mother had already met my father. She'd represented the Maisels, who

could only afford one train ticket, at a family wedding in Mobile. My father was assigned to escort her during her stay. There were lavish parties, teas, and dances, and my mom was seduced by the Southern hospitality. After graduating with a degree in sociology, she had a brief tenure as a first-grade teacher. My mother has never made it a secret that she doesn't really like children.\* She lasted exactly two days. She considered enrolling in graduate school but instead threw herself at the tall, dark, and handsome Southerner she'd met in Mobile. My mother didn't realize she was marrying into a family of bootleggers, gamblers, and fabulists. That was just the first of a lifetime of miscalculations. My sister, Lisa, says we snuck out of Mobile in the middle of the night, which may or may not be an accurate account, but it sure felt like our life had crashed and burned without warning to us kids. In reality, the trajectory was years in the making. There was the failure of an insurance company, the demise of a used-car dealership, and the short sale of a local radio station to a Christian broadcasting\* Mom says she only had children because that's what women were expected to do in those days. group, silver mines that didn't pan out, then a shady situation that tanked a real estate development in Toulminville, a suburb of Mobile. All I knew was that one day we were tooling around town in dad's Silver Cloud Rolls-Royce with the mahogany pull-down trays and the next we were homeless. Returning to Wilmington penniless broke my mother's spirit, but my sister and I had Moo Goo to keep us going. Lisa, my three cousins, and I hung on every word that Big Daddy, as our cousins dubbed our six-foot-four father with his booming Southern drawl, told of Moo Goo's derring-do. None of us recall the piratey particulars other than that the stories bordered on Orientalism and that his adventures ended abruptly with the news that Moo Goo had acquired a lady friend and Dad wouldn't be able to tell us any more of the story until we were all much, much older. Apparently, we still aren't old enough, because to this day we still don't know what became of the couple. It wasn't until many years later that I discovered that Moo Goo Gai Pan is a Cantonese chicken and vegetable stir-fry and not a dashing thrill seeker. Is it possible that my dad cooked up the Moo Goo stories to help us cope with the stress of living under one roof? Maybe. Was he casting himself as the Pied Piper, a welcome distraction from his new job, a Willy Lomanesque grind of selling Fuller brushes door-to-door? Maybe. Or he was just fucking with us. What I do know is that Moo Goo entered our lives in the winter of 1967 and held us in his sway until we could afford to move into our own apartment. Poor Mom. Even before our financial troubles, my sister was easygoing and eager to please, while I was born to make her life difficult. "Your first word was 'no' and you never stopped saying it," is my mom's characterization of me from the age of eighteen months to this morning. For too many years to be considered endearingly quirky, I refused to eat anything other than fried chicken, butter, and grape juice. This kind of pickiness is recognized now in the DSM as an eating disorder called "selective eating," but back in the day the official diagnosis was "a royal pain in the ass." Exactly how unkempt and unruly I was is something that members of my family never tire of repeating, and heralded the entrance of another outlandish fictional character into our lives. I think of this as the story called "Why It's a Miracle I Didn't End Up in a Straitjacket." Lucky the leprechaun, the mascot for the General Mills cereal Lucky Charms, stars in one of the most recognizable and memorable ad campaigns of all time. Those magically delicious commercials played over and over on our twenty-four-inch black-and-white TV screen and must have made a deep impression on my big sister. Lisa, seven at the time, calling up skills that would one day make her a successful CEO, decided to come to my mother's rescue by enlisting the services of my imaginary friend known as the Little Man. I was five years old, lying on my bed, doing something patently criminal, like licking S H Green Stamps and sticking them to my forehead or trying to untangle one of the wads of bubble gum that was always getting stuck in my long hair,\* when a high-pitched voice introduced himself as the Little Man. That my sibling was\* Peanut butter gets gum out of hair. My mother never made us PBJ sandwiches because all of our peanut butter ended up in my hair. Hiding under my bed pretending to be a little person who wanted me to eat my vegetables was more implausible than the perfectly reasonable explanation: I was having a conversation with a friendly, if somewhat fiber obsessed, neighborhood leprechaun. Thus began my relationship with the Little Man. The Little Man came on sweetly but in no time was issuing orders left and right. Uh-oh, you might be thinking, is this that kind of story? It seems to be headed somewhere it is not going. Still, isn't it bad enough that my imaginary friend's idea of a good time was getting me to wash behind my ears or lay out my clothes for school? He was not above bestowing small gifts and rewards for completed chores. If I, say, brushed my teeth, I'd find a piece of candy on my pillow, which would seem to be totally contradictory, but I suppose all in all, it paid off, because I only had three cavities growing up. My sister also taught me to read, an act she refuses to characterize as anything mercenary, but not long after I sounded out Fun with Dick and Jane, notes began appearing from the little guy: Make your bed, set dinner table, put dirty clothes in hamper. Even though my sister prefers to maintain the fiction that she only wanted to help me, other cousins remember it differently. "Didn't the Little Man order Annabelle to bring us milk and cookies?" my cousin Robin said at a family gathering last year. Little or not, I was working for the man. TLM was kind enough to move to Delaware with us, and with my mother on "bed rest," he turned into a real taskmaster. Lisa recruited my three cousins into the act and in any room where I might wander, he'd be lying in wait. Take the trash out! Do your homework! Brush your hair—all the way to the back! a note would read or I'd hear barked in my direction. I can't for the life of me remember how it all blew up, but I must have been traumatized because I was sent to see someone. The child psychologist was heavily bearded and stood all of five foot one. He looked so much like how I'd pictured the Little Man that I refused to speak to him. I still

wonder if the constant reminders of my slovenly ways turned me into the kind of person who, to this day, if I'm not vigilant, makes a good candidate for Hoarders.\* Both TLM's unmasking and Moo Goo's hooking up with a gal pal coincided with our move to an apartment of our own, but it was the distraction of our new dog that kept me from reporting my family to social services. "You kids promised to walk the dog and give him baths and you never did," said my mother and every other parent in the history of the world. Sure, my sister and I didn't want to actively participate in caring for a new pet, but with an apartment and a pet, it seemed like we were a normal family again. Petey was a Peekapoo, sort of an also-ran hybrid of a Pekingese and poodle. † One of the most prominent features of the Peekapoo is what has been termed its "hilarious attachment" to its owners. Our Peekapoo liked to be with us so much that he preferred to urinate on our feet rather than be separated from us by even a few inches. Our Petey was a barking hairball who collected everything in\* My son likens riding in my car to driving around inside that junk drawer that's next to the fridge, but I haven't gotten gum stuck in my hair in at least fifteen years. † Pekingese are extremely popular with actresses. It's so common to see those furry little faces peeking out of celebrities' handbags that you might think these puppies are standard accessories that come with the purchase, like a change purse. his path. Leaves, twigs, crumbs, even bits of poop were regularly found clinging to his scrawny body. His smashed-in Pekingese nose was often runny. He was a hot hairy mess, but that didn't dampen our enthusiasm for him, or so I thought. In 1972, my father landed a business opportunity in Florida. It was the beginning of a story he hoped would be titled "How We Got Rich." He rented a house for us in a gated island community in Biscayne Bay where the archbishop of Miami, deposed Nicaraguan dictator Somoza, and reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes owned compounds and estates had names like Casa Tranquila and Palacio del Eden. One of the island families kept the guardhouse stocked with ice cream sandwiches for kids walking home from school. The only thing was, the lease didn't allow for pets. I imagine that this was something of a relief to my mother, who was never really a pet person, and it must have seemed like a good way to soften the blow to tell my sister and me that Petey would join us later. His flight kept getting delayed. Then his flight was canceled. A few times. Flights from Wilmington to Miami were surprisingly unpredictable. A month after the move, the letter arrived. Dear Annabana and Leelee, I am fine, I miss you, but I will not be joining you in Florida. I am living with your dad's secretary, Caroline. I have had such a good time staying here that I don't want to leave. I have become Italian and I love spaghetti. We have it a lot! Love, Petey I've always assumed that my parents gave the dog to Caroline, Dad's secretary, even if the provenance of that paw print was really sketchy, but as I type this page, it's clear: that canard was as much of a fantasy as my elfin overlord or the swashbuckling stir-fry. Over the years, I worked Petey into countless comedy sketches and television appearances, much to my parents' mortification. I swore to myself that if I ever had children, I would never, ever, ever, "Petey" them, which is why I was surprised that when my son asked why he didn't have a sibling, I assured him that he did. "I don't know how to break it to you, but our cat, Stinky, is actually your sister, Amelia," I told Ezra when he was about the same age as I was when the Little Man befriended me. Wide eyes. "We put her in a cat costume for Halloween and the fur grew over the zipper." Wider eyes. I wasn't consciously coming up with this fabrication. It could be that I am a pathological liar, a diagnosis marked by chronic fictionizing, something I freely admit I am guilty of. During my acting years, I regularly testified to fluency in several languages with which I have only a passing familiarity and to being able to carry a tune, which makes me just plain ridiculous, as both are so easily disproven. Is it possible I was engaging in the kind of teasing that you don't get when you're a singleton, or feeling guilty for failing to give him a sibling? Maybe. Ezra had endured years of surgeries to correct anomalies associated with a congenital birth defect and I thought it would be beneficial for him to be a big brother, but I couldn't muster the energy for another child.\* Or maybe I was just fucking with him, relishing that ineffable jolt of pleasure you get when you test just how far you can stretch the truth with your children. I can't say that my son believed that he had a sister named Amelia any more than he believed in the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy, but I delighted in watching Ezra's eyes light up with the spark of imagination, or terror, as he'd feel for the zipper. I'd like to say that was as far as I took that story, but it's not. When Stinky the cat died, I couldn't let Amelia go as well—that would have been tragic—so Amelia had to be sent Elsewhere. Sometimes I'd say she was recovering from an unspecified illness, but I eventually settled on her being at boarding school, which had the added benefit of a veiled threat along the lines of We could send you away too if you don't [fill in the blank] and was just plausible enough to keep Ezra guessing. † It worked. Over the years, Amelia's notoriety has only grown. One afternoon, when Ezra was in ninth grade, he and a group of his friends marched in tandem into my home office. "Where is my sister, Mom? My friends don't believe me," Ezra demanded. "She's at a boarding school in Canada." "Prove it." I picked up the phone and dialed a number at random. As luck would have it, I'd phoned a social services center in Quebec. It was after hours and we reached a recording in both English and French that sounded enough like what I'd just described that the teenagers screamed with a kind of mad glee. Even I entertained the idea that I might actually have a daughter. I sighed, "See, she's in Canada and has gone native. If you want to speak to her, you'll need to learn French." I threw up my hands in feigned exasperation and exited for dramatic effect. When I told my sister about the latest chapter in the saga of Ezra's sister, Amelia, she said, "You're a weirdo," and, "It's like magical realism," and I racked my brain trying to remember if One Hundred Years of Solitude has a happy ending.\* "You know, I never connected it to our family," she went on to say, "but when I couldn't fall

asleep at night, I used to ask my husband to tell me the story of our sons' births, and if I was really anxious, I'd ask him to tell me about the deals we closed when we worked at the same law firm." "You asked him to recount the details of corporate real estate closings?" "These were really complicated contracts." Now who's the weirdo? \*VACTERL is an acronym for the constellation of birth defects. All were repaired except that he has a single kidney. "Well, you forgot to give me a second kidney, Mom," is his go-to when I'll ask why he forgot to clean his room/tell me he'll be home late/complete a school assignment, and it's hard to argue with that. † I also said she had "issues," which is why she didn't come and visit us from this boarding school/institution. Just shoot me.