

**2011-present**

**Jewish Experiences**

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**Annotated by Carlos R. Fernandez, annotations adopted from Amazon.com**

Hoffman, Amy. *Lies About My Family: A Memoir*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013.

This well-crafted family memoir is about the stories told and untold, and about the ways the meanings of the stories change down the generations. It is about memory and the spaces between memories, and about alienation and reconciliation. All of Amy Hoffman's grandparents came to the United States during the early twentieth century from areas in Poland and Russia that are now Belarus and Ukraine. Like millions of immigrants, they left their homes because of hopeless poverty, looking for better lives or at the least a chance of survival. Because of the luck, hard work, and resourcefulness of the earlier generations, Hoffman and her five siblings grew up in a middle-class home, healthy, well fed, and well educated. Hoffman's research in the Ellis Island archives along with interviews with family members reveal that the real lives of these relatives were far more complicated and interesting than their documents might suggest. Hoffman and her siblings grew up as observant Jews in a heavily Catholic New Jersey suburb, as political progressives in a town full of Republicans, as readers in a school full of football players and their fans. As a young lesbian, she distanced herself from her parents, who did not understand her choice, and from the Jewish community, with its organization around family and unquestioning Zionism. However, both she and her parents changed

and evolved, and by the end of this engaging narrative, they have come to new understandings, of themselves and one another.

Jaffe, Daniel M. *Jewish Gentle: And Other Stories of Gay-Jewish Living*. Maple Shade, Lethe Press, 2011.

“We know the territory that Jaffe writes in--lush, stark, unexpected, a Jordan flowing through it with Real on one bank and Dream on the other. Jaffe is not afraid to write about violence, or blasphemy, sometimes comically and sometimes horrifically...you are holding in your hands this new book of his. Where fractured novel and story collection are Velcroed to the music he composes, his Torah of the moment, the stories of our gay queer Jewish lives, seen and reseen, heard and reheard, with a lush orchestra of lived experience playing in the background. A collection of stories that could be a novel, the sections of a novel shuffled like a deck of cards. A lush Jewish gamelan for queer ears, queer hearts, queer minds. And otherwise.”-- from Andrew Ramer's Introduction

Ladin, Joy. *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey between Genders*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.

Professor Jay Ladin made headlines around the world when, after years of teaching literature at Yeshiva University, he returned to the Orthodox Jewish campus as a woman—Joy Ladin. In *Through the Door of Life*, Joy Ladin takes readers inside her transition as she changed genders and, in the process, created a new self. With unsparing honesty and surprising humor, Ladin wrestles with both the practical problems of gender transition and the larger moral, spiritual, and philosophical questions that arise. Ladin recounts her struggle to reconcile the pain of her experience living as the “wrong” gender with the pain of her children in losing the father they love. We eavesdrop on her lifelong

conversations with the God whom she sees both as the source of her agony and as her hope for transcending it. We look over her shoulder as she learns to walk and talk as a woman after forty-plus years of walking and talking as a man. We stare with her into the mirror as she asks herself how the new self she is creating will ever become real. Ladin's poignant memoir takes us from the death of living as the man she knew she was not, to the shattering of family and career that accompanied her transition, to the new self, relationships, and love she finds when she opens the door of life.

Losinsky, Barry. *Oy Vey! I'm Glad I'm Gay: A Memoir*. Intracoastal Media, 2013.

In this witty, insightful memoir, longtime school psychologist Barry Losinsky shares his painful coming of age story as an overweight gay man against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, his Jewish ancestry, Baltimore's race riots, and the AIDS epidemic. He eventually comes to terms with himself, finds the love of his life, and uses his own experiences to help troubled kids in the public schools. Written with warmth and heartbreaking honesty, the writer takes the reader on a journey that explores gay relationships and power of acceptance.

Milk, Harvey, Jason E. Black, and Charles E. Morris. *An Archive of Hope: Harvey Milk's Speeches and Writings*. University of California Press. 2013

Harvey Milk was one of the first openly and politically gay public officials in the United States, and his remarkable activism put him at the very heart of a pivotal civil rights movement reshaping America in the 1970s. *An Archive of Hope* is Milk in his own words, bringing together in one volume a substantial collection of his speeches, columns, editorials, political campaign materials, open letters, and press releases, culled from public archives, newspapers, and personal collections. The volume opens with a foreword

from Milk's friend, political advisor, and speechwriter Frank Robinson, who remembers the man who "started as a Goldwater Republican and ended his life as the last of the storefront politicians" who aimed to "give 'em hope" in his speeches. An illuminating introduction traces GLBTQ politics in San Francisco, situates Milk within that context, and elaborates the significance of his discourse and memories both to 1970s-era gay rights efforts and contemporary GLBTQ world making.

Myers, Andrea. *The Choosing: A Rabbi's Journey from Silent Nights to High Holy Days*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011.

A young Lutheran girl grows up on Long Island, New York. She aspires to be a doctor, and is on the fast track to marriage and the conventional happily-ever-after. But, as the Yiddish saying goes, "Man plans, and God laughs." Meet Andrea Myers, whose coming-of-age at Brandeis, conversion to Judaism, and awakening sexual identity make for a rich and well-timed life in the rabbinate. In *The Choosing*, Myers fuses heartwarming anecdotes with rabbinic insights and generous dollops of humor to describe what it means to survive and flourish on your own terms. Portioned around the cycle of the Jewish year, with stories connected to each of the holidays, Myers draws on her unique path to the rabbinate--leaving behind her Christian upbringing, coming out as a lesbian, discovering Judaism in college, moving to Israel, converting, and returning to New York to become a rabbi, partner, and parent. Myers relates tales of new beginnings, of reinventing oneself, and finding oneself. Whether it's a Sicilian grandmother attempting to bake hamantaschen on Purim for her Jewish granddaughter, or an American in Jerusalem saving a chicken from slaughter during a Rosh Hashanah ritual, Myers keeps readers entertained as she reflects that spirituality, goodness, and morality can and do take many

forms. Readers will enthusiastically embrace stories of doors closing and windows opening, of family and community, of integration and transformation. These captivating narratives will resonate and, in the author's words, "reach across coasts, continents, and generations".

Namdar, Isaac. *In This Day and Age?!: A Community at the Crossroads of Religion and Homosexuality*. CreateSpace, 2010.

Dr. Namdar comes from a Sephardic Jewish background. Since the general position of his community on homosexuality mirrors the Biblical prohibition, Dr. Namdar chose to keep his sexuality and his wedding private from his ancestral community. Two months after the wedding party, a fellow community member found his wedding photos online and proceeded to forward the link to everyone in the community. The leaders and the rabbis of the community took steps to excommunicate Dr. Namdar because of his sexuality. In this book, Dr. Namdar provides us with just enough insight into the customs of his community for the reader to appreciate the implications of his story. He then chronicles his experiences through a series of communications in the form of emails, phone call, and discussion board entries to give the reader a first-hand account of the extreme events surrounding his outing. Through this book, the author attempts to highlight the range of attitudes that exist in contemporary society regarding this issue.