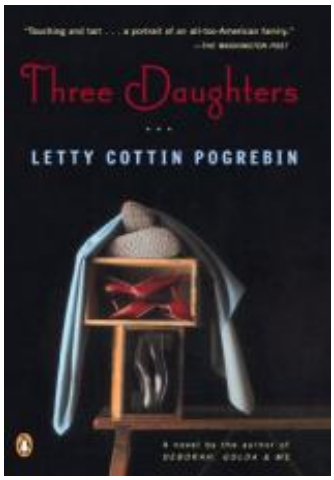
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Three Daughters

by Letty Cottin Pogrebin



About the Book

Three Daughters Letty Cottin Pogrebin's rich and compelling first novel, reveals the ebb and flow of relationships in a traditional Jewish family that is motivated by good intentions but marred by inescapable tragedies. Though Shoshanna, Leah, and Rachel, the daughters of Rabbi Sam Wasserman, share a common family, culture, and religion, they do not share a common history, and the repercussions of that fact shape each of their lives as well as their relationships with each other.

Shoshanna Safer, the youngest Wasserman daughter, is forced to reexamine her overly structured life when she finds her Filofax cascading across the highway, literally scattering her life to pieces. Shoshanna reacts to the mishap by risking her own life, dodging cars until nightfall, gathering the pages of her precious book. Creating order out of chaos is what Shoshanna does for a living and for peace of mind. Lately, she's been hoping to bring order to a family that has unraveled throughout the years. One of the pieces lost from Shoshanna's Filofax is a letter from her father, the esteemed Rabbi Samuel Wasserman, nearing ninety, living in Israel. Her father is planning a trip to New York City to receive a lifetime achievement award from the shul he presided over for close to thirty years. While pleased about the honor her father is about to receive, Shoshanna has her own agenda for what she believes will be Sam's last visit to the United States?healing the thirty-year rift between her father and her sister Leah.

Leah Wasserman, the only daughter to keep the Wasserman surname, is also the only daughter who refuses to speak to Rabbi Wasserman. An ardent feminist and political activist, with a prestigious academic career and unrelenting wit, Leah has rejected everything that reminds her of her father, especially Judaism. Years after Sam divorced Leah's mother and remarried Esther, he withdrew entirely from Leah's life, forcing her to endure a painful childhood with her emotionally unstable mother. Without her father ever having offered a reason for his absence, Leah has had a lifetime in which to manufacture one of her own. The volatility of Leah's childhood follows her throughout her adult life, undermining her relationships with her sisters and the rest of her family.

Rachel Brent, in an effort implying gratitude and allegiance toward her adoptive father, strictly adheres to the customs and laws of her Conservative Jewish upbringing. Rachel's athletic gifts eclipse her intellectual talents in the eyes of others, but eventually her Judaic scholasticism is understood as something far more significant than merely the hobby of a wealthy housewife with time on her hands. Rachel has spent years mired in a marriage that offered financial stability and sexual satisfaction, but never real intimacy. When forced to confront the truth about her husband, she is finally able to forge a new, ambitious path for herself.

Pogrebin's first novel presents a world both unique and familiar?one in which the past can overwhelm the present, family secrets can shape the future, and ever-shifting relationships are a staple of family politics. But the substance and magic of the novel lie in its surprising, original, and endearingly human characters. **Three Daughters** follows the Wasserman women during a year of crisis and change, but in that brief time an entire world is revealed and three generations of this unforgettable Jewish-American family are profoundly transformed.

Discussion Guide

1. With which sister do you *most* identify?

2. How did you personally relate to Leah's passionate political views?particularly about feminism, Judaism, or Israel?

3. Would you have made the same choice as Shoshanna when she witnessed Rachel's husband cheating?

4. Discuss the relationships that each sister has with Judaism or Jewish tradition. What in each woman's history would explain their differences?

5. Discuss the impact of nature versus nurture as it relates to the three sisters.

6. Different aspects of the story correspond to relationships in the Old Testament. Explore the parallels and their significance.

7. What kind of relationship do you imagine Leah might have had with daughters?

8. Throughout most of the novel, Daniel (Shoshanna's husband) can be perceived as virtually flawless. When something negative in his character is revealed, how does it affect your view of him?

9. Years ago, when Sam made his fateful decision, did he do the right thing? Did he have any other options?

10. In the novel, secrets create family dysfunction. Has that been true in your experience? Can you think of a situation in which keeping a secret from someone you love would be acceptable or justifiable according to your values?

11. How do you assess each of the Wasserman daughters as a wife and mother? What about their relation to their work or interests?

12. All three Wasserman women are concerned with order?keeping life under control and staving off various kinds of chaos. Discuss how the search for order plays out in the lives of Shoshanna, Leah, and Rachel, or in your own life.

Author Bio

Letty Cottin Pogrebin is the cofounder of *Ms.* magazine, a nationally known journalist and lecturer, and the author of eight books of nonfiction. **Three Daughters** is her first novel.

Critical Praise

"A dishy, upper-middle-class Jewish sisters' story a la Wendy Wasserstein...about strong women growing older and smarter."

?*Seattle Times*

"Equal parts touching and tart...Pogrebin's meticulous interweaving of past and present creates a memorable period portrait of an all-to-human American family."

?*The Washington Post*

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