

## Book Reviews

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### **The Question of David: A Disabled Mother's Journey Through Adoption, Family and Life**

Denise Sherer Jacobson.

Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Company, 1999.

#### **Reviewed by Doreen Gur**

For author and mother Denise Jacobson, family, love, pain, doubt, and resilience all play a significant role in *The Question of David*. This is a true story of a mother with cerebral palsy who contemplates adopting David, a baby who may have cerebral palsy. Jacobson deals with the complex and various issues surrounding adoption, and she does so from a social location that deems her an inadequate person and, more specifically, an inadequate mother. Since she is a woman with a visible disability, her opinions are often ignored. Jacobson struggles with her socialization as a disabled person in a nondisabled world and wishes she had been taught early on that she did not have to “overcome” her disability.

For Jacobson, living with cerebral palsy means dependence, care, and a general disregard for her views, along with social barriers that circumscribe the lives of individuals who are considered disabled, handicapped, or crippled. Additionally, to be disabled and a woman intensifies the negative perception of one's disabilities since these two social locations intersect to become interlocking sites of oppression. These negative perceptions are reinforced by the medical profession and its intrusive paternalistic ideology used to control women's reproductive choices, birth, even the right to choose whether to live or die.

Jacobson questions the value of medical intervention as she recalls the physical, emotional, and psychological pain that she endured as a child in

medical offices, hospitals, institutions, and “special” schools. Seen only as a person with cerebral palsy, Jacobson’s various abilities were virtually ignored. She questions whether or not the goals and expectations she had for herself would have been different had she not been labeled “severely disabled” and is highly opposed to labeling anyone, especially David, “severely disabled.”

Non-disabled individuals often take their independence for granted, especially since they do not have caregivers in their lives. Jacobson strives for independence and her resistance towards her au pair is a sign of determination and motivation. However, the more Jacobson attempts to resist her need for care, the more she realizes how demanding a baby can be. Here, the issue of care versus choice arises as the interdependence of care limits life choices for those who are disabled.

Understandably, in light of her despair and isolation as a child, Jacobson was hesitant to start a family. However, with encouragement from her husband and faith in her Jewish religion, Jacobson’s journey through adoption led her into the intimate world of mothering. When questions of disability and mothering arose, through moments of panic and excitement, Jacobson bravely faced her own insecurities.

In advance of adopting their son, Jacobson and her husband chose to name him David. They chose this special name to carry on the Jewish tradition of naming a child after a deceased family member. Jacobson’s book also evokes her strong emotional ties with her late mother, a bond that provided the impetus she needed to start her own family. When she lost her beloved mother, Jacobson became even more determined to build a foundation for David filled with support, care, and, most of all, unconditional love.

Denise Jacobson struggles to show the world that she is good enough to be a daughter, a wife, and a mother—a whole person of strength and determination. Against all odds, she does not give up and realizes her desire to become a mother.

## **Call Me Okaasan: Adventures in Multicultural Mothering**

Suzanne Kamata, ed.  
Oregon: Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing, 2009.

### **Reviewed by Ferzana Chase**

*Call Me Okaasan : Adventures in Multicultural Mothering* includes twenty-one thought-provoking essays on the mothering experiences of women bridging