

— Book Review —

'Grief' delves into religious, medical and family affairs

First novels can be dicey, especially when the subject is a procedure widely practiced since Biblical times that has recently come under close medical and cultural scrutiny.

East Bay author Lisa Braver Moss displayed courage in writing a story whose underlying subject is as delicate and controversial as circumcision. Fortunately for the reader, Moss writes with intelligence and heart. And I suspect she writes with the assumption that her readers have both as well.

Moss wryly sets "The Measure of His Grief" in Berkeley, a progressive and quirky enclave nearly as controversial as circumcision. Dr. Sandy Waldman, an endocrinologist, is married to Ruth, a nutritionist turned cookbook author. They have one child, an adopted daughter. Amy recently graduated from Berkeley High School but has confounded her successful parents by refusing to apply to any college and instead moved out and took a job with a UC Berkeley garden project. Such parental disappointment is not unusual, but Sandy and Ruth have

the additional emotional stress of dealing with the sudden death of his father, the senior Dr. Waldman.

Sandy's parents are Holocaust survivors and the burden of their experience has weighed heavily upon their son. The senior Dr. Waldman was a highly respected member of his community, yet his son, a respected physician himself, never felt worthy of him or accepted by him.

Sandy's relationship to Judaism is ambivalent and adhered to mostly on high holy days. He does, however, let a close friend convince him to open his home to family and friends of his father to sit Shiva on the last day of mourning. It is here, in his own home, in the midst of his confused feelings of loss for a man who was loved and feared in almost equal measure, that Sandy experiences excruciating and frightening pain in his groin.

Waldman, a man of science, is determined to discover the root of his pain — whether physical or emotional. His determination becomes an obsession of monumental mid-life crisis proportions.

At first, Waldman is unable to tell his wife what is happening. When he does, his revelation with its accompanying obsession becomes a wedge between them.

Ruth, whose own mother died just the year before, is left, along with Sandy's sister, to deal with his father's estate and the continuing task of overseeing the care of his mother, who suffers from dementia and lives in a care facility.

Waldman's research into the continued practice of circumcision has also jeopardized him professionally. While his obsession leads him to both medical facts and fiction, it also takes him into an unexpected and profoundly moving understanding of the faith of his Judaic culture. This is where Moss' talent as a storyteller is most evident. The body of medical, social and religious information brought into focus parallels but never overshadows the basic story of a marriage and family in crisis. We care about these people whose humanity is our own and we root mightily for love, understanding and reconciliation.



**SUNNY SOLOMON
FOR THE BOOKS**

Because circumcision is not just a Jewish practice but one performed, with great religious and cultural significance, by ethnic and religious groups around the world, as well as performed for purely health reasons, it is a subject of great, but seldom admitted, interest to the general public. I read this novel in almost one sitting, but it will stay with me for much longer.

We in the Bay Area live in a rich literary environment. What a pleasure to recommend Moss and her first novel, "The Measure of His Grief."

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