



The Unspeakable: And Other Subjects of Discussion

By Meghan Daum

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The Unspeakable: And Other Subjects of Discussion By Meghan Daum

A master of the personal essay candidly explores love, death, and the counterfeit rituals of American life in this "brave, funny compendium" (Slate)

Nearly fifteen years after her debut collection, *My Misspent Youth*, captured the ambitions and anxieties of a generation, Meghan Daum returns to the personal essay with *The Unspeakable*, a powerful collection of ten new works. Where her previous collection explores what it is to be a struggling twenty-something urban dweller with an overdrawn bank account and oversized ambition, *The Unspeakable* contends with parental death, the decision not to have children, and more—a new set of challenges tackled by a writer at her best, investigated in the same uncompromising voice that made Daum one of the most engaging thinkers writing today.

In *The Unspeakable*, Daum pushes back against the false sentimentality and shrink-wrapped platitudes that surround so much of the contemporary American experience. But Daum also operates in a comic register. With perfect precision, she reveals the absurdities of the New Age search for the "Best Possible Experience," champions the merits of cream-of-mushroom-soup casserole, and gleefully recounts a quintessential "only-in-L.A." story of playing charades at a famous person's home.

Combining the piercing insight of Joan Didion with humor reminiscent of Nora Ephron's, Daum dissects our culture's most dangerous illusions while retaining her own joy and compassion. Through it all, she dramatizes the search for an authentic self in a world where achieving an identity is never simple and never complete.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Thrillingly good ... Daum's powers as one of the most emotionally exacting, mercilessly candid, deeply funny, and intellectually rigorous writers of our time are on glorious display.” ?*Cheryl Strayed, The New York Times Book Review*

“[*The Unspeakable*] is formidable, lucid, and persuasive. Daum writes with confidence and an elegant defiance of expectation.... There is no doubt Daum is a brilliant, incisive essayist. I would follow her words anywhere.” ?*The New York Times Book Review*

“Sometimes our feelings-and our reactions to the things that happen to us-go rogue. Emotions are the messy, unpredictable part of being human. It's those murky corners of the heart that are hardest to acknowledge, let alone talk about. That's the unnamed place where Meghan Daum's sharp collection of essays lives.” ?*Entertainment Weekly (Rating: A)*

“Daum is a master of the bold admission.... Provocative.” ?*Los Angeles Times*

“For several years now, I've kept copies of some of these essays . . . by my desk . . . Her writing has a clarity . . . that just makes you feel awake.” ?*Ira Glass on My Misspent Youth*

“I loved these essays for a completely startling reason: they give voice and shape to so many of my own muddled thoughts--and to lurking sentiments I've never looked square in the face. Meghan Daum is a cultural clairvoyant: in exposing her secrets, she's listening to ours. She's also just a wonderful storyteller--funny, perceptive, and painfully wise.” ?*Julia Glass, National Book Award-winning author of And the Dark Sacred Night*

“*The Unspeakable* is a fantastic collection of essays: funny, clever, and moving (often at the same time), never more universal than in its most personal moments (in other words, throughout), and written with enviable subtlety, precision, and spring.” ?*Geoff Dyer, author of Otherwise Known as the Human Condition*

“*The Unspeakable* speaks with wit and warmth and artful candor, the fruits of an exuberant and consistently surprising intelligence. These are essays that dig under the surface of what we might expect to feel in order to discover what we actually feel instead. I was utterly captivated by Meghan Daum's sensitive fidelity to the complexity of lived experience.” ?*Leslie Jamison, author of The Empathy Exams*

“Here's the skinny on Meghan Daum: she's one of the most humane, entertaining, and articulate contrarians you're likely to encounter in any book. She challenges our assumptions--and her own--in the bracing, unsentimental manner of great British essayists such as William Hazlitt and George Orwell. Her precision is Didionesque. Her humor detonates unexpectedly. In page after page, Daum pinpoints aspects of love, grief, and daily survival that you've sensed vaguely but have never found the words for. To read this book is to begin to grasp the intricacies of living in a fresh and penetrating way. I solemnly promise, lucky reader, you are about to be changed.” ?*Bernard Cooper, author of The Bill from My Father*

“Meghan Daum is the real thing: a writer whose autobiographical essays--generous, frank, and unusually hilarious--reflect a steady, unflinching gaze at the truth. While ever alert to human fatuousness and

contradiction (starting with her own), Daum actually adores the world around her--its wonder and strangeness, beauty and dilapidation--and conveys that love in a way that honors the reader even as it delights." ?Terry Castle, author of *The Professor: A Sentimental Education*

"People I know still talk about Meghan Daum's 2001 debut essay collection, *My Misspent Youth*. Nobody writing about her generation was more incisive or entertaining than she. Now, as incisive and entertaining as ever, and having grown in experience, knowledge, compassion, and eloquence, Daum has clearly reached a peak. The honesty with which she explores our current culture as well as her individual conscience make this book as important as it is affecting. *The Unspeakable* is a brave, truth-telling book, a paragon of its genre, and a triumph." ?Sigrid Nunez, author of *Sempre Susan: A Memoir of Susan Sontag*

"A Joan Didion for the new millennium, Meghan Daum brings grace, wit, and insight to contemporary life, love, manners, and money." ?Dan Wakefield on *My Misspent Youth*

"I think it's fair to say that I can't tell you what Meghan Daum's remarkable book means to me--the exceptional often denies verbalization. Her diverse subject matter aside--Mom, Joni Mitchell, the fetishization of food--it's Daum's galvanizing energy that one finds so attractive; nowhere in her work is there evidence of the 'trance' that Virginia Woolf said characterized so many women's lives. Instead, Daum builds her various worlds out of great presence and imagination, and who wouldn't want to live in her new city?" ?Hilton Als, author of *White Girls*

"Sharp, witty and illuminating, Daum's essays offer refreshing insight into the complexities of living an examined life in a world hostile to the multifaceted face of truth. An honest and humorously edgy collection." ?Kirkus

About the Author

MEGHAN DAUM is a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, the author of *The Unspeakable*, *My Misspent Youth*, *Life Would Be Perfect If I Lived in That House*, *The Quality of Life Report*, and the editor of *Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed*. Her essays and reviews have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Vogue*, and other publications.

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