



My Adventures with God

Stephen Tobolowsky

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From legendary character actor Stephen Tobolowsky—who currently appears on *The Goldbergs*, HBO’s *Silicon Valley*, and Norman Lear’s new *One Day at a Time*, author of *The Dangerous Animals Club* and *The Tobolowsky Files* podcast—*My Adventures with God* is a funny, introspective collection about love, catastrophe, and triumph, all told through the lens of his evolving relationship with the mystery that is “God.”

As Tobolowsky explains, “It’s hard to believe in nothing. Even cats believe in suppertime. As much as we love certainty, we are often shaped by the invisible, the unexplainable—something we call faith. We are inclined to acknowledge the holy. Even if it is only a paper heart we find in an old suitcase.”

My Adventures with God is a series of short stories exploring the idea that most people’s lives seem to fit into the template of the Old Testament. We all have powerful creation myths: tales of our childhood and family, our first battles won and lost. It is our Genesis. Then, like in the Book of Exodus, we go into slavery. Rather than building pyramids, we lose ourselves in fear and ambition—in first loves, first jobs, too many dreams mixed with too much beer. We eventually become free, only to wander in the wilderness. At some point we stop and proclaim to the universe who we are. This is our Leviticus moment. We reconcile what we thought we would be with what we have become. We often attempt a mid-course correction. Then, as in the Book of Numbers, we are shaped by mortality as we bear the loss of family and friends. Finally, we retell our stories to our children hoping to make sense of the journey, as Moses did in Deuteronomy.

Tobolowsky’s stories tell of a boy growing up in the wilds of Texas, finding and losing love, losing and finding himself—all told through the prism of the Torah and Talmud, mixed with insights from science, and refined through a child’s sense of wonder. *My Adventures with God* not only shines a light into the life of one of America’s most beloved actors, but also provides a structure to evaluate our own lives and relationship with God.

My Adventures with God Details

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From Reader Review My Adventures with God for online ebook

Dave Courtney says

There are more than a few descriptives I could use to describe this book. Sweet, honest, revealing, emotional, inspiring, entertaining, funny, sad, reflective would all fit equally well.

The book works as a memoir, but more than that it is an exploration of some of the bigger "why" questions that have followed Tobolowsky through his experience not just of Judaism and religion, but of life in general. It reads more like, here's my life for what it is worth, and somehow God has managed to fit into the picture in some expected and many unexpected ways.

As a Christian I found his journey a testament to the richness of God and the importance of spirituality in the everyday. However, even if you aren't religious, don't let the title sway you into thinking this is simply a "religious" book. His reflections on life, God and spirituality are told in such a way that can make sense and inspire anyone no matter where they fall on the religious spectrum. It is the story of one person who is simply trying to live his life as honest as he can, and it just so happens that his Jewish faith has grown to become a part of that honest picture. And the further you get into his later years the more honest, and more important, his faith becomes, but in a path that is both broken, flawed and successful, the beauty of his storytelling is that he allows the reader to fully understand how he arrives where he is even if we happen to be somewhere completely different.

There is so much to enjoy here, but most of what I appreciated about Tobolowsky's memoir is the way it became a sort of faithful devotional and reflection in the day to day. I'm a bit sad that it is done, but he has reminded me that I also have a story to tell along my own journey. That I am now able to take the bits and pieces of Tobolowsky's own learnings with me along the way is a gift that I am grateful for. Not only did he enrich my appreciation of the Jewish faith, but he challenged the way I look at things like suffering, miracles and even family. So thank you for that Stephen.

Rick Lee Lee James says

Wish I could give this another star

Mr. Tobolowsky is one of the best narrative artists alive today. These stories of his life, told through the lens of the 5 books of the Torah will capture your imagination making you laugh, cry, look deeper into the heart of God, and then you'll wish for another chapter. One of my favorite books immediately.

Matt says

Who knew that this aged actor was actually such a sage? This book is full of profound insights and hilarious

stories (including the craziest "amateur-drug-dealer-fail" story I've ever heard). Not quite a five star book I don't think, but I'm glad I bought my copy 'cause I dog-eared lots of pages and will return to them later for Tobolowsky's insights.

Stan says

It's tough for me to know how to approach commenting on this book. First of all, for those as ignorant as I am, Stephen Tobolowsky is a pretty famous actor who I had never heard of! He is of my generation, but the only thing I have seen that I know he was in is *Groundhog Day* (a great film), but I cannot remember him from that film as it was so long ago!!! However, I heard him interviewed on a podcast, and it got my attention. Also, he tries (in a very general, not forced way) to parallel his life's journey with the books of Hebrew "Tanach", i.e. the "Five Books of Moses" as they have been called. He doesn't exaggerate this, and he doesn't get deeply into religious specifics, but this is definitely about his awakening to some meaning of religion, which had actually always been part of his life. I'm not sure if the structure was kind of contrived, but I can say for sure that he is a superb writer. His storytelling is tops. So even though this book left me a bit ambivalent, it was a very enjoyable read.

Marcus Wright says

I didn't like it. There were some touching moments (Abe), but throughout the jokes weren't funny. They were too wholesome (I met a girl named Alice Snail...turned out it was Alice Nell...that's ok, I liked snails...groan). If I were looking for something to read with my grandmother, maybe. And fitting it into the Torah format seemed forced. I think Mr. T is getting older and forcing meaning into the events of his life. The result is this memoir.

Sue says

Whether you loved Stephen Tobolowsky as Ned Ryerson in *Groundhog Day* or any of his other roles, enjoy his podcasts, or have never heard of him, if you enjoy a celebrity memoir that takes the road less travelled, this is the book for you. Tobolowsky tells the story of his life, in a round-about way, without all the usual name-dropping and lack of introspection that is the hallmark of memoirs by actors. Growing up in "one of six Jewish families" in Oak Cliff, Texas, Tobolowsky has lived a life grounded in the love and values of his family. He is a natural storyteller who searches for meaning in the important - and trivial - events of his life. Whether he's talking about a drug deal gone hilariously wrong in Dallas or sharing the story of Abe, his Holocaust survivor friend, Tobolowsky gets right to the heart of the human condition in a way that is both entertaining and thought-provoking.

Cindy says

Don't let the title scare you. There's very little "God" in this book.

Or as Stephen puts it: Your life is your life. The way you see it is all a matter of philosophy.

That is everything you need to know about Stephen going in. He is a modern day philosopher, weaving life experience with science, literature, theology, and philosophy.

I've been a long time listener of The Tobolowsky Files (the podcast where most of these stories originate). I've spent many afternoons crying in my cubicle from his stories.

Four years ago, when I escaped to the wilds for some peace of mind, he had released his first book, The Dangerous Animals Club, on audiobook. I listened on the long drive to familiar stories of his childhood encounters with water moccasins and tarantulas and his first love as a young man.

Four years later, I was making the same drive, the same demons still hovering on the periphery, and Stephen's second book, My Adventures with God, was released on audiobook.

Again, most are familiar stories from the podcast, this time focusing on moments in life where you feel something otherworldly push or pull you in different directions..

His first lesson is in "a priori" knowledge -- knowledge or truth without prior experience, something that just is (this is a very long and complex philosophical rabbit hole if you are so inclined) -- but which he also introduces theologically about how angels whisper knowledge to babies and shortly after they are born, they forget everything. Life is a series of seeking a priori knowledge we lost.

Other moments include a fatal neck injury that was not fatal due to severe arthritis that changed the curve of his neck and spine.

Or befriending a Holocaust survivor.

Or a medically-forced silence to save his voice, which he feared at first and then came to appreciate. I liked this bit since as a teenager, I completely lost my voice for two days. I ended up enjoying the silence and miming so much, I didn't tell anyone my voice had returned for another three days. :P

Perhaps the most moving were the stories of being a little boy and recognizing a little girl was trying to tell him something important by the way she insisted they play with her dolls. He felt compelled to tell his mother about the girl's odd behavior. She wound up missing and murdered shortly after.

Or his boyhood love who decades later recounts tales of tragedy of being a child and seeing Stephen's nice life and going home to be abused by her mentally ill parents. But they both have fond memories of the time a young Stephen gave her a flower and proposed at the age of 5.

My only disappointment is that he only tells one story about his friend, Bob Darnell. You said you would always tell his stories, Stephen. Are you waiting for book three?

If you are an anecdote freak, I would say pick up his audiobooks or give his (free) podcast a listen! He makes you think about your life and how to better derive meaning from it.

After all, your life is your life. The way you see it is all a matter of philosophy.

Barry Bridges says

Something I learned from Stephen Tobolowsky...would be a good dinner party opener, like Tobolowsky and I met at some cocktail party in a Los Angeles back yard, two bald guys connecting, one Baptist, one Jewish, hanging around finding their lives on parallel spiritual trajectories.

Tobolowsky's adventures did connect for me. I found much to contemplate. Many will miss his subtle humor, possibly discount his perspective, but the contemplative and reflective will find his journey valuable and insightful no matter the faith (or lack thereof) background.

And yes, I would like to hang out in that back yard with him, in the seventies, or today.

Cale says

I listened to this book on Audible and it was wonderful! Tobolowsky does not disappoint. He is a gifted storyteller and I was hooked on every story.

Julie Davis says

I really enjoyed these stories which is a memoir from Stephen Tobolowsky, who long-time listeners of his podcast call Tobo. Tobo is a master story teller and about 2/3 of these tales are from the afore-mentioned podcast, The Tobolowsky Files, albeit with more of the context and depth one expects from a book. One of the things I've long loved about the podcast is the way that Tobo finds traces of God and meaning in the seemingly ordinary things of life — all without being sappy or pushy about it. That's how I roll too, so these stories are right down my alley. Of course, I listened to the audio book because no one will read these stories to you better than this author.

Jenn Tesch says

How are more people not talking about this book? It's so funny + brilliant. Sharp wit mixed with hilarious, introspective anecdotal autobiographical short stories as Stephen Tobolowsky (Google-image search him and you'll be like, "oh! That guy") lays out his theory that people's lives fit into the template of the Old Testament.

You don't have to be Jewish or religious or even buy into the Old Testament theory to appreciate the life lessons Tobolowsky drops. He takes you through his childhood in Texas, to launching his acting career in LA (there are some real wild stories), to his first failed marriage and finally meeting Ann, love of his life in an unexpected way and father of his two boys. With side ventures including his friendship with a holocaust survivor (my favorite chapter) and a heartbreak revelation in adulthood that a close childhood friend was abused growing up.

It's disappointing if the title or religious undertones are scaring readers away from this one because it's a rare laugh-out-loud, touching, entertaining and insightful gem that really unpacks Life. And at the end of the day

I appreciated the religious undertones because Tobolowsky treats his relationship with God as imperfect and something to continually recontextualize, question and redefine.

Stephen says

First and foremost: a belief in any kind of religion or deity is not at all required to enjoy this book. Indeed, spirituality is only incidental to many of the stories presented; though, as always, Tobolowsky will connect the dots to a larger point. Unlike "The Dangerous Animals Club", this has a more purposeful structure, as he divides the stories up not only chronologically (again, unlike "Club") but into five sections that represent the first five books of the Bible. The first section (the "Genesis", if you will) is of childhood memories, and the questions about life that we all have. In part 2, an odyssey of young-adult adventures comes with questionable choices and unexplained phenomena. He has become untethered in his Exodus and must find his way back. And so on, as he reconnects with his Jewish roots, starts consulting holy books and wise rabbis, and begins devising answers to his own questions.

Whereas "The Dangerous Animals Club" was more a loose collection of stories that were largely humorous, "My Adventures with God" is clearly driving towards an endpoint, with a more serious tone throughout. "Club" may be the more relaxing read, but "God" will try to punch you in the gut a couple times. As a result, it's probably the "better" book of the two. A reconnection with childhood friend Alice reshapes all that Tobolowsky thought he knew about her in a heartbreakingly honest way. A stranger hanging around the synagogue is revealed to have chilling ulterior motives. An elderly friend has experienced far more of humanity's dark side than anyone should ever know. All events, Tobolowsky seems to argue, can be interpreted through a holy or scientific lens that leads to further enlightenment. And he has enough material in his life to give them some weight.

Listeners of "The Tobolowsky Files" podcast will be pleased to know that probably more than half of the book is new material. There are still some repurposed stories from the podcast, such as: the time he discovered he can hear "tones"; a survey of all the pets his family has owned; a sort of chopped-up rehash of his heart surgery adventure; and "A Good Day at Auschwitz", though even with that we still get a lot more of his conversations with Abe, who proves to be one of his most enduring characters. But there is still a decent amount of new material, especially from his childhood and of his interactions with his wife and sons.

If you have stumbled upon this book but you haven't yet read "The Dangerous Animals Club", I recommend doing that one first. But this is still another knockout, and I hope we continue to get more of these over the years. Even if he just stuck with the podcast stories, there is still plenty more material to share.

SundayAtDusk says

While the description of this book says it's a series of short stories, that's not how I would describe it. That makes it sound too much like a free-association memoir with a lot of short chapters. I didn't count the pages in any chapters, but I think this book is best described as a substantial memoir of Stephen Tobolowsky's personal life, particularly where his faith is concerned. It's not like a religion book, however, even though the reader learns a lot about Judaism from it. It's a book about one man's thoughts and questions about the meaning of life, and what should he think and do next? (There is little about his acting career, in regards to specific movies or television shows. So, any reader looking strictly for that type of talk needs to look

elsewhere.)

Mr. Tobolowsky grew up in Dallas, Texas and had what sounded like a normal type childhood during the 1950s-1960s. His family was one of few Jewish ones in his neighborhood, and his mother did not want him and his siblings to seem different, so they celebrated Christmas. Only, there was no Christmas tree. Santa stashed the presents under the dining room table. There's an amusing conversation retold in the book about when the author questioned his mother about Santa's strange gift stashing, one of many funny stories in the memoir. The stories aren't all humorous, however. There are some quite sad ones. In addition, there are some intriguing ones about coincidences and the author's psychic abilities.

College found Stephen Tobolowsky ditching the synagogue, and spending a lot of time changing his lifestyle and goals. After college, was Los Angeles with his girlfriend Beth Henley, and their pursuit of acting and writing jobs. Much of the time, however, was spent socializing, drinking and smoking pot with fellow wannabes, and even forming a rock band where the members were usually stoned. Various jobs were taken to pay the bills by both the author and Ms. Henley, until she wrote the play "Crimes of the Heart", which catapulted them into the good life of L.A. Good as in a big house, a big pool, lots of booze and drugs, and naked guests running around all the time. The end came when he and Beth Henley broke up, but oddly that's exactly when Mr. Tobolowsky's acting career took off for good. Along with a long, successful career, came marriage to his current wife Ann; fatherhood; dealing with obnoxious kids; aging; and always, always, questions about life and God.

The author had returned to the synagogue as an adult, returned to where he started as a child. His wife eventually converted to Judaism, only telling him later she had been taking classes to do so. One gets the impression he possibly wasn't totally happy about that either; that his faith was all his own; not really a family matter. That idea, of course, would be outrageously foreign to countless Jews, but Mr. Tobolowsky's parents appeared not to be involved with the synagogue of his youth. He often told how his mother dropped him off there, not how they all went together there as a family. His own sons' childhood experiences with organized religion also seemed to be limited, or maybe he chose not to discuss the matter much in the book. Yet he often talked about his relationships with rabbis and others who attended synagogues he attended.

Faith and one's relationship with God is often a very personal thing to many people, though; something one shares at times; while searching or stumbling forward all alone at other times. Many readers will probably be most happy Stephen Tobolowsky decided to share this time with this memoir. (Others, on the other hand, will probably complain he didn't share enough information about the movies and television shows he appeared in, and didn't dish any dirt! :)

(Note: I received a free ARC of this book from NetGalley and the publisher.)

Matt says

Phenomenal. He's a talented storyteller who weaves together personal history, spirituality, science, and more. A must-read!

Natalie Weinstein says

This is one of those rare books that is so much better than I ever expected! I've seen Stephen T. act here and there, but I had no idea of the depth of character, knowledge and insight he could offer as an "average" Jew. He blew me away again and again and again. He is a great storyteller with great stories to tell.

I like how his mind works. I like how he's chosen to live his life and how he has so deeply and intentionally integrated Judaism into it. This is probably considered a spiritual memoir, with the exception of a middle section about his years partying way too much in LA. It's possible he included that section to contrast who he has become, but I would have preferred a much tighter edit of that section or more commentary and less drug-saturated anecdote.

Again, I love this book. I actually loved it within a minute of starting it, which is very unusual for me. I especially enjoyed it as an audiobook. Stephen reads it, which is wonderful, especially when he chuckles here and there. It's not something you could replicate in print.
