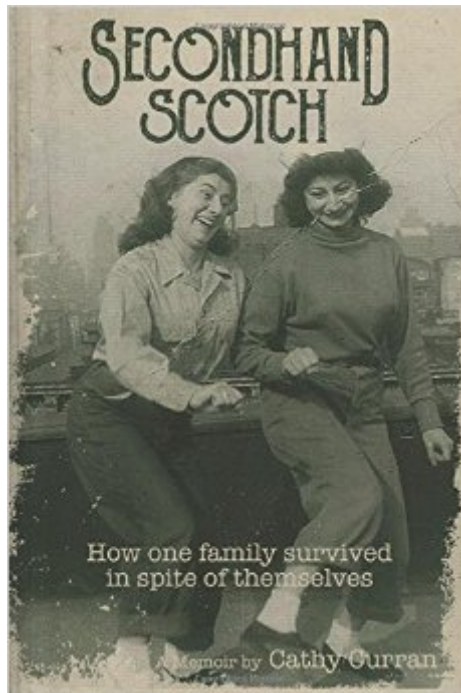


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# Secondhand Scotch: How One Family Survived In Spite Of Themselves



## Synopsis

When your grandparents make bathtub gin and go shopping with funny money, and your dad flaunts his degree from the school of hard knocks, you grow up learning that "life ain't no got-dam picnic." These lessons are handed down to Cathy Curran by Eastern European immigrants who learned how to survive, caring little for aesthetics "if it worrrks, who gives a got-dam what da hell it looks like." Lucky for Curran, her mother is a gentle soul with a dry wit. Lillian Low's homespun values "people come in all flavors just like ice cream" bring joy and humor into the Low house. When restless Joe Low ditches one suburb for another because he wants a do-over, Lillian tells him, "How the hell many do you need? Don't you know that wherever you go, you've got to take yourself with you?" Along for the ride is the colorful, extended Low clan, who turn up to celebrate the arrival of Joe and Lillian's army of kids. They eat, sing, Joe gets plastered, and all too often, scotch-fired arguments lead to some good old-fashioned fistfights. The mayhem that actually started the brawl gets swept under the carpet, and when Curran finally pulls it up, pandemonium emerges from hell with a vengeance. Through the vision of a sensitive young girl with a wickedly funny voice, "Secondhand Scotch" uncorks some harsh realities, but never ceases to warm and entertain.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Written over a ten year period, this extraordinarily well-researched memoir tells the story of the author's Eastern European family from the late 1800s when, as immigrants, they settle in the

United States. With very little money but an uncompromisingly tough attitude, and great resourcefulness to back them up, her great grandparents survive and create decent lives. But it is hard, especially for the children. Each family member is expected to pull their weight and failure to do so results in a summary beating. This is the culture that Cathy's father, Joe, is born into. Rather than learning from the mistakes of his Russian father, Joe adopts the same approach in his own life. Joe marries Lillian, a beautiful young lady of Armenian and Greek descent who has a personality that combines a dry wit with a strong sense of family traditions. Both coming from large families, they follow suit and produce nine children of their own. Cathy is one of these. We learn through her young eyes about their turbulent upbringing with a father who works hard, drinks hard and often vents his violent passions on his wife and family. She also gives us an insight into her sibling relationships, one sister of whom is plagued by jealousy and treacherous inclinations which leads to dreadful consequences. But the book is not solely an account of family abuse. Cathy gives an insight into the riotous experiences they have with other family members at clan reunions. With a multitude of eccentric cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents it's a time for socialising and fun. It's time for singing, dancing, eating and telling stories. But it's also a time for drinking. All too frequently they end up in a fistfight as Joe succumbs once again to the excesses of scotch whisky.

I was offered a beta copy of this book by a third party, to read prior to publication. The opening sentence of Chapter 1 "I was born wanting to live, but I lived wanting to die, and now that most of my life is gone, I want to live again." makes an interesting opening. It is suggestive of the content of the book, with greater understanding evolving for the reader as they begin to vicariously live the life of the author. As an adult, the author has learned to make sense of the inter-generational family violence she witnesses, both the physical and emotional. Rising above the many negative experiences, Cathy Curran writes with empathy and understanding of her family and their history, and in the process, finds her own place within that history. While there is violence, there is humour within this story, some of it comical and some of it black humour. Fortunately this helps to lighten the experience for the reader, given the abusive nature of many family members. This book is a well-documented inter-generational family history of negative behaviours. This is not a "poor me" story, but one of the struggles the author's forebears endured in their own homelands and also in their emigration and settling in the USA. Her own struggles as a child seeking love and approval but more frequently receiving rejection, are also documented. In the midst of such a large extended family full of love for one another, it seems to be a contradiction in the midst of the emotional and physical abuse that frequently erupts amongst the adults. The same abuses regularly exist between

the author and her father, and the author and her older sister, which invariably involves further punishment for the author, from her father.

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