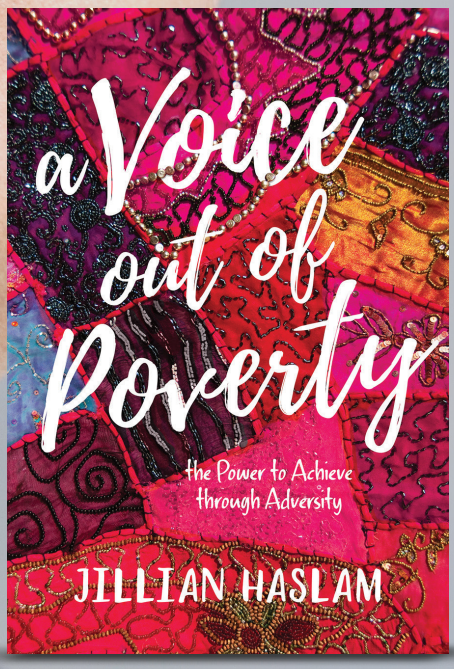
TO TELL THE TALE

Varied in tone and place, these five memoirs speak from the intensity of lived experience. From pandemic shutdowns in London to Arizona deserts, Calcutta slums, Manhattan fertility clinics, and St. Louis suburbs, they represent decades-long, compelling histories of exclusion, connection, tenacity, and emergence.

MEG NOLA



A Voice out of Poverty
The Power to Achieve through Adversity

Jillian Haslam, Top Reads Publishing (SEP 13)
Softcover (232pp), 978-1-970107-23-4
SOCIAL SCIENCE

Jillian Haslam's compelling memoir *A Voice out of Poverty* recounts the penury of her Calcutta childhood and her subsequent determination to become a force for social change.

The daughter of a British father and English-Armenian mother, Haslam grew up during the 1970s. Her parents struggled to keep their children fed, and the family was often homeless. Also at a young age, Haslam witnessed the death of her twin siblings due to malnutrition. Without money for a burial plot, Haslam's father placed the tiny bodies in a wooden tea chest and disposed of them himself. Disheartened and depressed, he "barely spoke for weeks."

When another baby in the family appeared to be dying, Haslam became desperate. Because her mother was unable to nurse the child, Haslam begged a shopkeeper for milk. He refused at first, but the ten-year-old was relentless: the vendor ladled out some "liquid gold" to save her sister's life.

Beyond Calcutta's endemic poverty, Haslam endured discriminatory harassment due to her Christian faith and Anglo-Armenian heritage. Called "white rats," Haslam and her multiracial siblings were regarded as "intriguing curiosities" or "targets for ridicule, belittlement, and abuse." Financial duress further overwhelmed and separated Haslam's family.

But there were happier moments, too. While sewing together fabric scraps to make clothing or bedding, Haslam's resourceful mother told the biblical story of Joseph's coat of many colors. And her father insisted that his children respect knowledge, noting that "the best school in the world is at the feet of an elder."

Now an award-winning activist, Haslam draws strength from the memories of her parents' love, the work of Calcutta's Mother Teresa, and her own determination. *A Voice out of Poverty* is a vivid, harrowing, and inspiring account of survival, triumph, and a career in charitable outreach.



The Marmalade Diaries

The True Story of an Odd Couple

Ben Aitken, Icon Books (JUN 14) Hardcover $27 (326pp)
978-1-78578-902-1, AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Ben Aitken's *The Marmalade Diaries*, is about becoming housemates with a much older stranger during Britain's second Covid-19 lockdown.

Aitken met Winnie in October of 2020. Winnie's children were concerned about their eighty-five-year-old mother's insistence on living alone in Windy Ridge, her Victorian home in London. In exchange for providing "a bit of security" and doing various "odd jobs," they invited Aitken to move into the apartment on Windy Ridge's top floor. Soon after their agreement was reached, however, Britain declared another shutdown, and Winnie and Aitken became more sequestered with each other than expected. They found themselves with time to observe the home's yard and garden, with its daffodils, primroses, and a busy birdhouse getting "more traffic than the port of Dover."

The book is written in journal form. It details Aitken's developing relationship with Winnie, who grew up during the turmoil of World War II. Stoic and self-reliant, she's also captured as intelligent and sharp-witted. Though her son, Arthur—with cerebral palsy and living in a nearby care facility—held her devotion, Aitken recalls that Winnie also admitted that the recent death of her husband left her feeling lost and "unhinged."

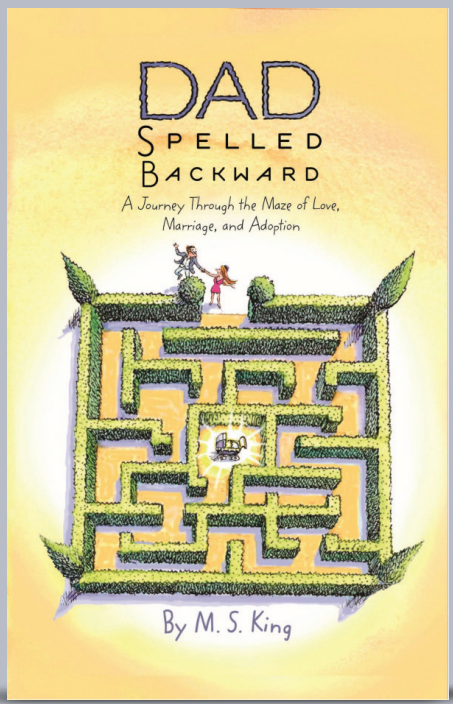
Aitken is developed in contrast to his housemate. He was born in the 1980s, and writes of himself wryly, as a "snowflake" millennial. In interactions with Winnie, he is tolerant and perceptive, helping to soften her more stubborn tendencies. Thus, though Winnie could be critical, she became fond of (and rather dependent upon) her new housemate. He was even included in the preparation of a batch of her homemade marmalade, watching Seville oranges and sugar bubble together in a vast "pot of cartoonish dimensions."

The Marmalade Diaries is a delightful pandemic journal—filled with camaraderie, quirkiness, claustrophobia, and a memorable bridging of generations.

Dad Spelled Backward

A Journey Through the Maze of Love, Marriage, and Adoption

M. S. King, Cypress House (JUL 25) Softcover $14.95 (220pp)
979-898540860-7, FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS



M. S. King's *Dad Spelled Backward* chronicles his and his wife's frustrating yet fulfilling quest to have a baby.

King, a New York dentist and comedian, was in his fifties when he met his wife, Gaby. Though, when King was younger, his Jewish mother had hoped that he would marry a woman of the same faith, he notes that the passage of time had rendered his mother happy that he had just found a "mammal" to marry. She was delighted by his intelligent, beautiful French bride.

Though King was undecided about having children, Gaby was determined to get pregnant. The couple's initial conception attempts, or what King calls "Fertility Hell," involved familiar procedures, like filling sperm specimen cups and obsessive tracking of Gaby's ovulation cycles. King also tried natural "virility enhancers," such as yohimbe and ginseng; he ended up in the hospital when their combined effect began to feel like a heart attack. Later, a Chinese acupuncturist advised King to "drink more water" for his weak kidneys, while positioning needles throughout his body to stimulate potency and "chi."

After further fertility tests and unsuccessful artificial insemination, King and Gaby decided to adopt. *Dad Spelled Backward* recounts the arduous process that followed, including posting adoption advertisements, interviewing respondents, and their feelings of intense disappointment after a birth mother opted to keep her baby. The couple's costs ran high: there were attorney and administrative fees, as well as plane fares to meet with prospective candidates. There was also the psychological toll of prolonged expectation.

Dad Spelled Backward is a heartfelt, sage, and funny look at the worthwhile gauntlet of domestic adoption. It's also a compelling portrait of a marriage, showing how the bond between King and his wife grew stronger and more resilient as they navigated their unique path to parenthood.