

Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed: Sixteen Writers on The Decision Not To Have Kids By Meghan Daum My own mother passed away when I was a teen and I can't imagine coming home from the hospital with a newborn and not having her there to tell me what to do with my nipples. I would have to forgo most of the things that I've always wanted to do that I couldn't afford when I was in my twenties.

The choice to have a child can be just as selfish as the choice not to. I've always enjoyed alone time and independence and if I do end up in a nursing home I'm sure by that time there will be plenty of robots dressed as candy strippers to keep me company. "Don't you want to see your genes passed on?" This is our biological imperative.

Such a necessary essay collection in a society that still glorifies having children even with the existence of many other paths to fulfillment. I appreciated these writers mostly women who shared about their diverse range of reasons for remaining childless - deriving meaning from other worthwhile life pursuits not feeling a parental instinct having had negative experiences related to parenting on the receiving end of it and more. I liked the theme of how most if not all of these writers did cultivate rich content lives without kids as well as how the stigma surrounding not having kids felt worse than the experience of not having kids itself. Shriver writes about how she feels sad that she won't be able to pass down her European genes and she mourns how white people won't be the majority in the United States in a couple of decades. She neglects to acknowledge the genocide against Native Americans that European Americans executed in the first place to establish their majority in this country nor does she take into account the forced sterilization of Black women that has occurred in the United States. What's worse is that she writes about her "grief" in a smug and superior tone as if she's admitting to something particularly poignant that other people just don't have the courage to share. 9781250052933 I was slightly disappointed that most of the women in the book had actually courted or coveted motherhood for a time - and more missed the window than made an active choice. I'm not I hate kids or anything but I really don't have the patience to deal with temper tantrums and even when it's time to play it's exhausting to put myself on the same level as a small kid for more than anything considered brief. I come across so few like-minded females and as more and more of my friends begin to procreate I feel like they're drifting away from me (whether because we now have less in common or because they just have less time I don't know but it still makes me sad) So I was really excited to read this book and feel like I could relate. But where are the essays from the young happily coupled up (or not) successful women that decide to not reproduce and have to deal with being regarded as a heretic or *gasp* a career-woman? And apparently there are only so many excuses to be childless since these 16 essays seemed to spout off about the same 5 issues surrounding child-rearing. 9781250052933 Sixteen Literary Luminaries On The Controversial Subject Of Being Childless By Choice Collected In One Fascinating Anthology One of the main topics of cultural conversation during the last decade was the supposed fertility crisis and whether modern women could figure out a way to way to have it all--a successful demanding career and the required 2. Selfish Shallow and Self-Absorbed makes a thoughtful and passionate case for why parenthood is not the only path in life taking our parent-centric kid-fixated baby-bump-patrolling culture to task in the process. I wanted to read the perspectives of writers who not only didn't have children but were thrilled with the decision to the point of being relieved that they trusted their intuition who like me are edified by their decision each passing year rather than being unnerved by it or the social judgment that accompanies it. I found several of my own reasons for being persona non mama scattered throughout but the BEST and most identifiable for me was the final essay written by a man (Tim Kreider's The End of the Line). Yet despite claims of diversity by Daum it lacked that big time; I'm always guarded by a mainstreamer's view of diversity which tends to translate into less than ALL being the same or five kinds of ethnicity from the same region of one continent. In any event it was pretty vanilla in terms of presented SES of the authors and I beg the question of what's the point of diversity if there's an effort to deny how that impacts the decision to

have a child. Still it's a start and overall well-written while also being refreshingly honest on everything from abortions to relationships to being able to love a friend's child while having ZERO envy for the life they live in raising said child. I'd re-read most of these and they did inspire me to write my own essay on the topic - purely for self-edification and seeing how many of the authors' ideas intersect in my own life while knowing that certain concerns were never voiced by this group (I mean - it is only 16 essays and what it means to be an *insert blank* woman within more segregated communities who opts not to have children and the reaction from a particular culture that is insulated and isolated from the larger mainstream world of most of these authors is another matter. People on both sides of the reproductive divide tend to be self-congratulatory about choices that are let's be honest completely beyond their conscious control like people who've inherited wealth thinking they deserve it. Parents need to somehow justify the lives of sputum tuition and sarcastic abuse to which they've condemned themselves and so make their own grandiose claims about parenthood's ineffable fulfillments and beneficent effects -that one cannot possibly know what real love is unless you've had children that it is life's ultimate purpose et cetera. If the ultimate purpose of your life is your children what's the purpose of your children's lives? To have your grandchildren? Isn't anyone's life ultimately meaningful in itself? If not what's the point of propagating it ad infinitum? For me and many in this volume there is no point. But I've never been one to ooh and ahh over baby pictures find myself unable to resist pinching baby cheeks or feel the desire to babysit just to spend an afternoon enjoying a child's company. More and more people (in the Western world at least) are choosing not to have children and I think this work gives a good sample of the reasons why one reaches that decision. Thus this is a book that would not only appeal to those (like myself) who know they never want children but also to those who cannot understand why being childfree would be a choice someone would want to make. While I'm not overly concerned with validation from society for my choices it is nice to hear stories of people who have made similar decisions even if for very different reasons. While I was initially drawn to reading the essays by authors already known to me such as Lionel Shriver some of my favorites turned out to be from authors previously unknown to me. Whereas most of the women seemed to feel the need to qualify their decision with statements about liking kids but determining kids just weren't for them or ensuring that people realize that they don't hate kids and love their nieces/nephews/friends' kids etc. " He goes on to say: In a park looking at smiling mothers and fathers strolling along with their adorable toddlers I react like the pope confronted with a couple of gay men walking hand in hand: Where does it come from this unnatural desire (to have children)? ["Over and Out" by Geoff Dyer] Since one of my favorite novels of all time is We Need to Talk About Kevin I was really looking forward to reading Lionel Shriver's essay. Rather than detail her decision not to have kids she instead wrote more about demographics in general in both America and Europe as well as declining fertility rates and a "birth dearth" in Western societies. " Along with the stories of abuse and neglect a few women actually chose to have abortions rather than bring a child that they weren't sure they wanted or could adequately care for into the world. I found Michelle Huneven's essay especially moving: My experience of living in my family had deeply instilled a sense that behind the closed doors of a family's home all respect disappeared; disapproval anger and other emotions ran unchecked and a domestic form of war prevailed with war's oscillations between overt violence and tense calm. I think it's important for those who are parents to realize that their lifestyle is not the only valid choice nor are all those who make the choice not to have kids selfish shallow or self-absorbed! It is simply one of many life choices typically involving a large amount of deliberation and self-reflection. As I made my way through my twenties watching my friends have babies I would feel the occasional twinge of a biological urge and assumed one day that would be me with the swollen belly and piles of tiny jumpers to organize. I love my freedom love the thought that we can leave for a vacation on a whim or as the essay by Tim Kreider said "There's really nothing stopping me on any given Tuesday morning from taking up heroin. Reflecting on my life as the oldest sibling of four I can remember how nervously I would watch my sisters and brother when we were out in public how much I would worry about them especially when we went swimming in the murky lake-I'd hold my

breath every time as I waited for the bubbles that mean a head was about to pop through the surface. " Such people are considered selfish or immature when the truth is that the decision NOT to have kids is often something people put more thought into than the decision TO have kids. And honestly I was just too lazy to upload a photo of myself so how am I supposed to overcome this ridiculous laziness to raise a child? Thankfully I have three siblings who plan on having kids so in a sense my genes will live on. I have two children I completely love and adore but the reasons I chose to have them were (in my opinion) selfish shallow and self-absorbed even if the actual raising of them sometimes requires saint-like patience and sacrifice.) And furthermore I desperately want my own children to give me grandchildren one day- even at the potential cost to some of their own happiness- how's that for selfish? Additionally my own mother seemed - quite the opposite of me- a somewhat reluctant mother. So I was very receptive to this collection and it went beyond the ideas that I already held enriching my overall view of other people's decisions of whether to have kids or not. I especially enjoyed Maternal Instinct by Laura Kipnis which is a really interesting feminist take on the decision not to have children; Be Here Now by Lionel Shriver which highlights some of the racist and cultural motivations in the perpetuating the idea of reproduction in particular countries; The Most Important Thing by Sigrid Nunez which explored the time when having children was often a misfortune; Over and Out by Geoff Dyer and "The End" by Tim Kreider. Geoff Dyer touched on this issue a little and Tom Kreisler addressed it more directly: in a nihilistic universe what value does your work have? Hypothetically if we are a bunch of bacteria on a rock hurtling through space then the value of our work probably isn't in any discernible way more significant than any other particular experience including the experience of being a parent. On the other hand if there's a God (and maybe even if there's not) and an understanding of deep sacrificial love is the greatest earthly value or experience then maybe they're missing the mark? The authors of the essays are all professional writers so they all have work to do which is imbued with spirit in a way that many other people's jobs are not. But I get it if it's your heart's passion is to be a CEO rather than to be a parent and as a woman you think that being a parent will get in the way of your CEO dreams you should do you.

9781250052933 Meghan Daum is the author of Life Would Be Perfect If I Lived In That House a personal chronicle of real estate addiction and obsessive fascination with houses as well as the novel The Quality of Life Report and the essay collection My Misspent Youth. She has contributed to public radios Morning Edition Marketplace and This American Life and has written for numerous publications including The New Yorker Harpers GQ Vogue Self New York Travel Leisure BlackBook Harpers Bazaar The Village Voice and The New York Times Book Review. Equal parts reporter storyteller and satirist Meghan has inspired controversy o Meghan Daum is the author of Life Would Be Perfect If I Lived In That House a personal chronicle of real estate addiction and obsessive fascination with houses as well as the novel The Quality of Life Report and the essay collection My Misspent Youth. She has contributed to public radio's Morning Edition Marketplace and This American Life and has written for numerous publications including The New Yorker Harper's GQ Vogue Self New York Travel Leisure BlackBook Harper's Bazaar The Village Voice and The New York Times Book Review. Meghan's work is included in dozens of college textbooks and anthologies including The KGB Bar Reader Bookmark Now: Writing in Unreaderly Times and The New Gilded Age: The New Yorker Looks at the Culture of Affluence. Born in California in 1970 Meghan was raised primarily on the east coast and is a graduate of Vassar College and the MFA writing program at Columbia University's School of the Arts. She spent several years in New York City before making her now infamous move to Nebraska in 1999 where she continued to work as an essayist and journalist and wrote The Quality of Life Report,

I think about the idea of doing it and I know that it is not an experience I want for myself: I'm an incredibly anxious person and sometimes just having a cat to provide for is stressful enough--a dog seems like too much work for me: I don't trust that I would ever feel confident in what I was doing to the point where I wouldn't permanently fuck up a child, It's only been within the last couple years that I've gotten to a place where I feel financially stable and the cost of raising a child would almost

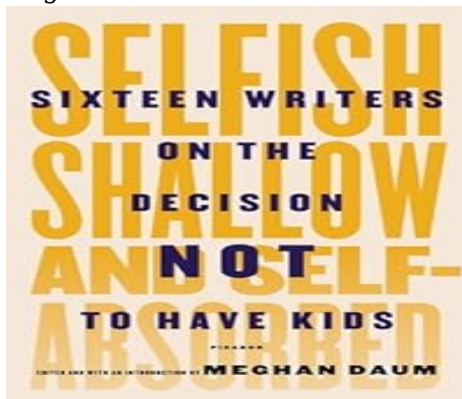
certainly destroy that: "Aren't you afraid you'll be alone when you're old?" This thought has never bothered me much as there is no guarantee I will even get old. There's also no way to know if your kids will have a significant amount of free time to spend with you as adults: As a more femme person leaning toward not having kids I felt more connected and less alone while reading this collection, A couple standout essays included Kate Christensen's "A Thousand Other Things" and Sigrid Nunez's "The Most Important Thing: " While some of the authors' voices started to blend together I'd give most of the essays in this collection somewhere between a 3, I'm dismayed that the editor included the essay or at least did not prompt Shriver to actually self-reflect and own up to her racism, News flash being contrarian and racist doesn't equate to emotional or intellectual depth, I wish the editor had used her white privilege to call Shriver out as well as include more authors of color in this collection. 9781250052933 I received a digital ARC of this title from Netgalley: I made up my mind on this years ago and now as I near 30 I have no inclination to change my mind. What else could explain the crawling horror I feel at the prospect of pregnancy? Nope no babies for this girl. My niece is expecting a baby in a few months and I'm excited: But and this is key I'm excited because I'm not the one having it, I'm looking forward to playing Aunty reading books and going to museums and imparting subversive feminist wisdom to my niece's daughter: But I'll get to send her back to mommy when she won't quit crying or I need a nap, I love my family breathlessly but I also love sleep and time to read books: I don't want to test my lack of self sacrifice on a child: So all of this is to say this book was written for me, I completely understand where these writers are coming from even if some of them phrase it in terms I find objectionable. What I do find fascinating/frustrating is how this conversation always falls on women: If we don't we must have had terrible childhoods or be otherwise defective, (For the record my childhood was aggressively normal and very loving: I am clinically depressed and while that does figure into the calculus not to breed it's not the only reason,) This all goes back to the insidious notion that women are *for* babies. We are supposed to subsume ourselves into our children and if we don't we're selfish hags, I belong to me not some future hypothetical creature that I have to create out of my own flesh. I recommend this book if anyone has ever made you feel bad for not wanting to have children, Be who you want to be not who you think you should be. ironically I most identified with a male writer's essay because he has always firmly known he didn't want children -- one of only a couple in the book: But still I found the essays interesting and I love that the topic is now open for intelligent dialogue: 9781250052933 I've known since I was a kid that I didn't want to be a mother, I have a distinct memory of being 7 or 8 and joining my own mom and her aunts and cousins on a Memorial Day trip to decorate family graves. In the cemetery I remember coming across a string of Depression-era headstones for a set of siblings who all died as children and declaring I never wanted to have kids: I don't know why that was the moment it clicked for me but it was: The women who were there with me all enjoyed a good laugh and told me that I would change my mind one day when I grew up. You know what? It's been more than 20 years and I still haven't changed my mind, But just as recently as last week people are still telling me that I'll change my mind: Turns out people ask a lot of questions about your plans for parenthood when you are a newlywed, I want to tell all these people I'm 31 goddamn years old. I've had moments of doubt along the way where I wonder if maybe I'll regret it when I get old, I've even picked out names for children I know I don't want (Chelsea Evan and Ryan Cage): 9% of the time and I wouldn't have the kind of mobility I want in my life to be able to move to a new city uninhibited: I think of how busy I am now and how hard it already is to find time to relax between work and general household kind of stuff: Then there's the fact that I simply don't enjoy being around kids: I know it's not something I want and I know it's not something I would ever feel like I was doing well: There were a few essays that made me wrinkle my nose but overall this book is fantastic, The summary called to me the intro was stellar and had me nodding in agreement with the editor and then I started reading the essays: I think that there were only 3 or 4 that spoke to me the rest were either uninteresting or thoroughly depressing. I'm sorry but I don't think that finding yourself in middle age unmarried without children and coming to terms with that is the same as deciding to not have children, I cannot relate to women that are relieved to have miscarriages and

feel as though they dodged a bullet, Yes I suppose that perhaps does make them selfish shallow and self-absorbed writers though but an active decision it does not make, My heart breaks for the writers with the gut-wrenching childhoods and I understand their choice: Now however conversation has turned to whether it's necessary to have it all or perhaps more controversial whether children are really a requirement for a fulfilling life: The idea that some women and men prefer not to have children is often met with sharp criticism and incredulity by the public and mainstream media, In this provocative and controversial collection of essays curated by writer Meghan Daum sixteen acclaimed writers explain why they have chosen to eschew parenthood: Contributors Lionel Shriver Sigrid Nunez Kate Christensen Elliott Holt Geoff Dyer and Tim Kreider among others offer a unique perspective on the overwhelming cultural pressure of parenthood, What emerges is a more nuanced diverse view of what it means to live a full satisfying life: *Selfish Shallow and Self-Absorbed: Sixteen Writers on The Decision Not To Have Kids* This hit the spot: Of the 16 essays one was offensively privileged (*Be Here Now Means Be Gone Later* by Lionel Shriver) and one was just. narrow-minded to the point of being disgusting (*You'd be Such a Good Mother If Only You Weren't You* by M, I mean this broad talked about which people deserved her attention; get the fuck outta here. Most went out of their way to explain that they loved children or were involved with them in some other capacity. Why? There was still an underlying air of defensiveness that was disappointing but I suppose just speaks to the larger need for more collections of this kind. I was also buoyed by folks admitting how many people have kids just to avoid regretting not doing it only to realize that no life is regret-free, But I'm free to write that journey; Daum doesn't need to find someone to do it for me though that would be more diverse): So three stars for several reasons but I enjoyed each one of those stars, And I so love a Kreider quote of what much of opting to honor feeling complete without reproducing means to me that I'll end with it: Admittedly calling not having children the ultimate act of free will may be a little grandiose. Reproduction as *raison d'etre* has always seemed to me to beg the whole question of existence. 9781250052933 I received this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review, At my age however this statement is usually met with the response of Oh but you're so young. This is not only condescending but inaccurate (which honestly bothers me more). We're told that it's natural to desire family life to want to hold a baby in your arms and experience the torrential downpour of hormonal affection: Like one essayist in this collection explicitly states I want to want to be a mother: But beyond the fact that the magic of children has always eluded me there have always been a thousand reasons why I've thought I shouldn't have them. Most of those reasons are skillfully articulated in this collection (it is after all a compilation of essays by professional writers). The essay that reached me the most was the one by Jeanne Safer: She criticizes the notion of having it all; it is simply not possible to have it all. We all give up certain possibilities in exchange for a different set of experiences and there is no life without regret, To have children means giving up a life without them or giving up the freedom that a childfree existence allows. I found each and every essay fascinating and identified with at least one idea in each of them. 9781250052933 Much has been written about women having it all and the difficulties for women with balancing work and child-rearing: Literature also abounds on the topic of infertility detailing stories of women who long to have children but are unable for various reasons. However very little has been written about making a conscious well-thought out decision NOT to have children and even less so from a male perspective, Social groups are plentiful for women who are mothers from informal playgroups to organized activities such as mom & baby yoga, Parents tend to be drawn together through their kids' sports and other extra-curricular activities: Parents often frequently congregate in yards enjoying conversation while watching their children play: For individuals without children it can be difficult to form friendships and join in such social circles due to having little in common: While not necessarily intentional the topic of conversation practically always revolves around child-related issues. *Selfish Shallow and Self-Absorbed: Sixteen Writers on Their Decision Not To Have Kids* edited by Meghan Daum details the decisions of sixteen writers not to have kids. Most (thirteen) of the essays are by women however three are by men, All of the essays resonated with me on some level due to the fact that I also made the decision not to have children very early on in my adult life:

Even though more and more women seem to be making the decision not to have children it is still not the choice of the majority, I particularly enjoyed the essays from the three men as they were refreshingly honest and completely unapologetic regarding the decision not to have kids. Geoff Dyer even stated that he's only had two ambitions in life one of which was "never to have children. She then gave examples of three women she knows personally (and considers friends) who are at different stages of life and who do not want children. Finally she briefly mentions her own situation but never really delves very far into her thought process, I did admire Shriver's frank statement of "I could have afforded children financially." Other essays were of a more somber nature and recounted stories of childhood abuse or neglect which influenced their decisions regarding having (or not having in this case) children: Sigrid Nunez began her essay with "There was a time during my childhood when I believed that all children were unwanted. Even as I learned that not all families were like this I didn't trust myself not to recreate what I had known: ["Amateurs" by Michelle Huneven] I am very glad that Meghan Daum decided to take this subject on and am thankful to the sixteen writers who agreed to share their stories. I would highly recommend the book not just to people who have decided not to have kids but even more so to all those who do have kids. *Note: Thanks to NetGalley and Macmillan-Picador for a complimentary advance reader's copy of , 9781250052933

Until about a year ago I always thought I would eventually have kids. I'm not entirely sure what changed but lately I've been pretty convinced that motherhood is not for me, My boyfriend/roommate has always said he doesn't want children and I believed him but always kind of secretly thought he would change his mind. Now looking at our relationship and why this was never a deal breaker for me I can see the truth is my love for him has always outweighed my desire for a baby: If a baby had really been that important to me I would've done everything in my power to pursue that goal: " An extreme example to be sure but the man has a point--there is no end to the free will of the childless: And though some might say that this is an obvious mothering instinct the truth is that it was not fun in the slightest. I don't like being anxious and the thought of being in that state for years does not appeal to me: Not to say that you should actively avoid what you're afraid of but to me the risks are greater than the rewards. As you can see I have my reasons for resisting motherhood and found myself curious about how other people's reasons compared, One of my favorite bloggers mentioned this book and I immediately knew I had to read it partially in order to discover if this could be the lifestyle for me, Contained within are 16 brilliant touching and funny essays by (mostly) older writers--13 women and 3 men--who ultimately decided not to have a child, Some of them always lacked the instinct some let their lives decide for them others wavered over time, One woman went so far as to pay for sperm from a donor get pregnant and miscarry before realizing it wasn't what she actually wanted. Although most of the essays held my interest my two favorites were "A Thousand Other Things" by Kate Christensen and "The Trouble with Having It All" by Pam Houston: The first spoke of how if she had gotten what she wanted when she wanted it (a baby) she would not be living the wonderful life she has now: She also emphasizes how it's pretty much impossible to miss something you've never had, She writes "I picture my life without children as a hole dug in sand and then filled with water. " I found this to be a beautiful image and true--for those who don't have children we will fill our lives with other joys, Along these lines the latter essay delves into the idea of "having it all" and tries to debunk the myth that there even is such a thing, Because the truth is by having a child you have no choice but to give up something that you would have otherwise enjoyed. Another common theme within is the social stigma against people who are "child-free by choice. Obviously and yet are my genetic traits really that important? I'm fairly positive I'd make a beautiful and creative unique weirdo. It would also be trippy to see what my boyfriend and I would look like combined. But there are lots of websites for that if I'm really curious: "I've never wanted to be regular and I don't plan on starting now. And I promise that plenty of people have regretted having children leaving them with grandparents or in foster care or doing the unspeakably-worse. The great thing about this book is it is not trying to change anyone's mind, I expect more childless people will read it than parents but hopefully some of the latter will because it can be illuminating to read about an alternate lifestyle. In the cases of many of these writers they

feel it has helped their careers to have the free time to sit at a desk for 12 hours and pump out novels: Obviously there are plenty of working writers who have kids but it takes a special kind of person to be able to do both: I truly believe if you're questioning like me it will provide invaluable insight. 9781250052933 The idea that people who choose not have children are selfish has always been completely preposterous to me, That is I desperately wanted my own kids my own family little me's to shower with affection. In contrast I think people who adopt or even those who don't have children are way less selfish and shallow, Especially since our overpopulated planet is basically on fire now. (Sorry fellow moms it's not a judgment on you it's a judgment on myself. I also noticed a thread of a number of writers who felt unsatisfied with their own childhoods. Though I noticed that for such highly intellectual and often atheistic arguments the women in these essays never doubted the importance of the work they wanted to do. So maybe the sacred nature of their work particularly skews their view of this issue. Stephenson or Michel Combes providing to the world as the CEOs of ATT and Sprint respectively? None that I can think of. Since 2005 she has written a weekly column for The Los Angeles Times which appears on the op ed page every Thursday, Since 2005 she has written a weekly column for The Los Angeles Times which appears on the op ed page every Thursday, Equal parts reporter storyteller and satirist Meghan has inspired controversy over a range of topics including social politics class warfare and the semiotics of shag carpet, She has been widely praised in the press and elicits particular enthusiasm from , com customer reviewers who have hailed her work as everything from brilliant and outrageously funny to obnoxious arrogant rambling dribble (sic), Meghan has taught at various institutions including California Institute for the Arts where she was a visiting artist in 2004 and taught graduate nonfiction writing. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband Alan Zarembo and their sheepdog Rex {site_link}



. There's a whole slew of reasons why I feel this way. Let's count the ways: 1. 2.5-to-4.5-star rating. However Lionel Shriver's essay was absolutely atrocious and racist. I will never have children. If I have a 'biological clock' it's assuredly broken. Call me immature; I suppose I am. That would be unfair. Women are just assumed to want babies. I was never abused. Well then I'll be a selfish hag. So that this doesn't become a polemic I'll stop here. Know your own mind people. I think I've had enough time to think this through. But 99. Throwing a kid into the mix would be overwhelming. It's just not for me. Not even a little bit. Call me selfish call me self-absorbed whatever. Reading it was a powerful experience for me. 9781250052933 I'm quite disappointed. I had such high hopes. 3 children--before their biological clock stopped ticking. Almost. (G. Lord). Others were a study in the conventional. I don't want children. You'll change your mind. Not every woman is built to be a mother. Children can be great sure. In many ways I wish that was me. As an extreme realist this was refreshingly honest to me. Parenthood is never attacked. The men did no such thing. I just didn't want them. I constantly feared something would happen to them. Into every void rushes something. Nature abhors a vacuum. Time does not bend to our wills. And I plan on being a delightfully demented auntie. 3. "You should do it because it's what normals do. 4. "You'll regret it if you don't." It's possible... but everyone in life has regrets. The art is the baby. I'm very happy I stumbled across this collection. <https://yeshallbejudged.wordpress.com>. But for example what particular value

is Randall L