



Life After Genius

M. Ann Jacoby

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Theodore Mead Fegley has always been the smartest person he knows. By age 12, he was in high school, and by 15 he was attending a top-ranking university. And now, at the tender age of 18, he's on the verge of proving the Riemann Hypothesis, a mathematical equation that has mystified academics for almost 150 years. But only days before graduation, Mead suddenly packs his bags and flees home to rural Illinois. What has caused him to flee remains a mystery to all but Mead and a classmate whose quest for success has turned into a dangerous obsession.

At home, Mead finds little solace. His past ghosts haunt him; his parents don't understand the agony his genius has caused him, nor his desire to be a normal kid, and his dreams seem crushed forever. He embarks on a new life's journey -- learning the family business of selling furniture and embalming the dead--that disappoints and surprises all who knew him as "the young Fegley genius."

Equal parts academic thriller and poignant coming-of-age story, *LIFE AFTER GENIUS* follows the remarkable journey of a young man who must discover that the heart may know what the head hasn't yet learned.

Life After Genius Details

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From Reader Review Life After Genius for online ebook

Caitlin says

2 1/2 stars.

Mead is a rather arrogant, socially clumsy genius who is about to graduate college at 18. Unfortunately, some bad stuff has gone down and Mead would rather go back home to his small town life than stay at university. This story jumps around in the timeline, telling stories of Mead's distant and recent past interspersed among stories of his present. You'll meet the head of department who ignored Mead at first but obsessed over him later, the professor who kept Mead going in the right direction, and the frenemy who probably ruined everything.

It was just too stressful for me.

Leann says

Closer to 2.5 stars, once you factor in the last 50 pages or so.

Carey says

What could drive a brilliant young man to leave college eight days before graduation, without his degree, and return to his hometown to work in the family Mortuary business?

Being a genius is a difficult thing. For Theodore Mead Fegley, it has brought him nothing but grief. He started high school at the age of twelve, finished in three years, and started college at the age of fifteen. He has always been younger and smaller than everyone else. And, of course, the victim of taunts, ridicule and pranks for his entire school career. He is thrilled to go to college, where he thinks he will be among equals, learned individuals who will value his intellect. Poor kid, how wrong he is.

To facilitate the brand new start Theodore feels he is getting with college, he starts to go by his middle name, Mead. Unfortunately, the very first day he is reminded, yet again, that he is different from everyone else and does not fit in. Girls are too old for him, he is too young for drinking and partying, he has little in common with other young men on campus. His life is lonely and friendless. His only real friend, his cousin Percy, is off pursuing his dream of baseball glory. Percy sends a constant stream of postcards to Mead, letting him know what is going on in his life. But since Mead has no friends he doesn't really know how to BE one, so he never responds to Percy's postcards.

Mead excels at mathematics and spends his college career working on solving the Riemann Hypothesis, a 150 year old mathematical theory. When Herman, a wealthy and attractive fellow math student, befriends Mead it seems a little strange to him that this guy would want to spend time with him. But Herman offers to help Mead on the Riemann Hypothesis so, against his better judgement, Mead allows himself to go along with Herman's schemes. The results will force Mead to change, come to some important realizations about

life and to see his parents and family through new eyes.

With *Life After Genius*, M. Ann Jacoby has written a wonderful story about the process of growing up. It is not enough to be smart, maturity lies in the ability to put aside your selfish concerns and do what is better for others, both people you love and people you may not like very much. She reminds us all about the discomforts of our school days when all we wanted was to be included, be liked, be part of the "in" crowd. You will fall in love with Mead Fegley, a sweet and awkward boy who learns the most important part of being a man.

Alice says

Mead Fegley is a solitary 15-year-old prodigy who flees his oppressive, well-meaning family for the wilds of a prestigious university in Chicago.

I find the book intriguing and a wonder to read, thought provoking and conversational. With the structure of the suspense with Mead without reason stopping home, despite the fact that what he chooses to do after he returns home was never revealed, Jacoby provides readers with the urge to read page after page to find out what goes on next. For some that wants to be on the top of the world as a genius, this novel provides another perspective, from the first person narrative point of view, as a matter of fact. As an unique individual in the society of one, Mead insulated himself from family and schoolmates out of self-preservation and desires to connect.

The novel, however, appears to be unfinished, and there really should be a sequel to what happens next, with Mead finding out his real purpose in life, are some topics untouched at the end of the novel.

Julie Shelton says

The characters and story are good. But it just kind of went on a little too long. The nagging question I'm left with is What does being a friend really mean? It makes you think about those relationships that were hard. The ones you let go and the ones you kept.

Brian says

A predictable, and not especially cleverly written piece.

Sometimes it is hard to write up characters who are smarter than yourself.

Christine says

I finished this book in a day. Couldn't put it down. Loved every second of it. At least, until I got to the last

page, realized it was over and now I'm dealing with emotional trauma dealt at the hands of a book! This was going to be one of my all-time favourite books, but I don't know how to cope with the ending. If the author had tied up more of the loose ends I wouldn't have thought twice about giving it five stars. And maybe that's part of the point of the book; life isn't tidy and things are rarely finished up neatly when it's all said and done. But just because life is that way doesn't mean that's how I want my books to end! Argh! I'm traumatized I tell you! Traumatized!

Sara says

I lied a little bit. I haven't actually finished reading this book, but at page 110 I have grown so tired of it that I thought I'd read the reviews here to see how it all plays out. Unfortunately, no spoiler alerts, so I might never learn what the mystery is and if Meade ever gets his young life together. I couldn't help thinking that the author was trying desperately to write Catcher in the Rye for the 21st century. The writing is so self-conscious, contrived and clichéd, and I just hated to see the way Meade was treated throughout his life; it borders on sadistic to put this poor character, and the reader, through such torment with no real pay-offs or even enlightenment. To me, it is a depressing book and a very sad commentary on human nature. I found little to like in any of the characters, including Meade, and the small dingy world they all inhabit and the mystery wasn't enough to pull me through to the end.

Later that day...

Well, I cheated (first a liar and now a cheater, this book is making a monster out of me!) and skipped over to the last two chapters, just to give myself a sense of "closure" (hate the term, but it's useful here). If anything, the ending of the book made me hate it even more, it left me with a dull empty feeling and the sense of being had - which makes me angry. It's been a long time that a book has caused this kind of visceral anger in me and I have reduced my initial two star rating to just one. Perhaps it is mean-spirited of me, but I wonder if this book was published simply because the author is in the publishing business herself. You know that old expression, "it's not what you know, but who you know"; in my opinion, this book should never have been published. (the cover is quite good though)

Jennifer Defoy says

This was a weird one for me. I liked the story, even though it was a bit odd, but I didn't really connect with the main character. But the mystery of why Mead came home was pretty engaging. I just wanted to know why. The story jumps around through different times in Mead's life. It got to be a bit confusing at times, as Mead also seems to be having a bit of a nervous breakdown throughout the story. But the jumping around really adds to the mystery of what happened and if Mead really is starting to lose his mind.

Mead appears to have had a rough social life growing up. Being so smart and so much younger than the kids he's in school with made him a bit of a target for bullies and such. So it's really no surprise that once Mead goes to college young he's still an outcast. Herman, Mead's best friend/mortal enemy tries to befriend Mead for a while and has to take a HUGE step to get Mead to really open up. But as the story progresses we learn that while Herman seems to have been born with the silver spoon his life wasn't really all that easy.

Even though I didn't particularly care for either of the main characters there was something about this story

that I couldn't walk away from. It was so out there at times and yet so "normal". It's so hard to describe. Even the ending was a bit odd, and it left more questions than it answered. But at the same time most of the really important stuff is cleared up before we get to the end. Like I said it's hard to describe...

Serena says

Life After Genius by M. Ann Jacoby is a book that examines one young genius' struggle to find himself and his place in his own family and society.

Theodore Mead Fegley's father runs a furniture store and funeral home with his brother Martin, while his mother's main goal in life is to push her son to achieve as much as possible and not squander his intelligence. The pressure mounts for Mead as he speeds through his elementary and high school years, reaching the University of Chicago at age 15.

The narrative easily shifts from the present to the past, and the chapter breaks make it easier to keep the timeline in perspective with details about what period in Mead's life is witnessed and what location he is in. Mead is a young teen thrust into academic life with peers who are much older and experienced. Mead's life takes a stark turn when he meets Herman Weinstein, a fellow mathematics student at the university. Mead's pushed aside as his faculty advisor chooses Weinstein over Mead after the professor is offered a department head position. Mead is angered by the turn of events, but only until he finds a new mentor, Dr. Alexander. Mead throws himself into the Riemann Hypothesis, and he hopes to either prove or disprove the hypothesis, which has been debated for more than 100 years.

Jacoby easily weaves in events from Mead's past into his present and how those events shape Mead and his actions at the university. Herman insinuates himself into Mead's life, and tensions rise until Mead finds himself running home to rural Illinois before graduation, his major mathematical presentation, and his valedictorian speech.

While math problems make me cringe, this story brought me back with the discussions of matrices--math I actually understood at one point--but Jacoby does a great job of including this information without burdening or boring the reader. As Mead's life unfolds and the mystery grows more intense, the pages flow quickly as the reader grows more anxious to find out why Mead left the university. This novel is dubbed as an academic thriller, but it is more like a coming of age story. Mead finds himself, what's important to him, and how to cope with his reality.

Jeffrey says

Mead Fegley is a genius and goes to college at a young age to study mathematics where he has a real aptitude, but his journey to college is waylaid and he rushes home a few days prior to his presentation of an important paper on a noted mathematician's theorem. Jacoby's tale is split into three separate time lines, which are her way of showing how Mead turned out the way he has, what happened in college and why he left. This non sequential story worked for me although I could see how it would not work for everyone. The most recent timeline is right before his presentation of the paper and graduation from college, one of the other timelines is three years before when he started going to school and the other is about his life as a youth. There are a lot of side issues that Mead has to deal with besides the main one. Firstly, there is the death of his

cousin. Then there is his cold mother. Finally there is the situation with his Aunt's reaction to his cousin Percy's death and finally there is his situation with Herman Weinstein, a student in his college who he is running away from. In the end Mead does grow up a little and take awareness of his life, but as in all decent books its the journey of self discovery that is the main thing and I thought this journey was handled well.

Katherine says

A coming-of-age story, if anything, is what *Life After Genius* develops into as the life of Mead Fegley unravels and re-ravels as he struggles with choices he makes in his final year of college. Mead, a childhood genius who, quite easily, is accepted into college at the age of 15, and is set to graduate at 18 decides, willingly, to throw away his entire education. His reason to do this? To give up possible fame of becoming the closest person in history to get anywhere near disproving or proving the Riemann Hypothesis, as well as his entire education, I found, very, very silly. Albeit, this story hops from one time in Mead's life to another, from his childhood, to the present, the future, and back again. This style of writing is not confusing, as it adds to the interest of the book, although it does become an immediate frustration once the mystery of why Mead came home begins to unfold.

I must say this book was interesting, and I found myself leached to it for two days straight. With both the arrangement of the chapters, and the impressive setting and character descriptions that help you imagine each scene, this book will not disappoint if you are looking for a gripping read. It keeps you wanting, which keeps you reading. However, in the end you are left with many questions; the only downside to the novel. After everything begins to add up, and you think you know what will happen, it ends. Just like that, three hundred and eighty some pages later, it ends without an explanation. That is the only downside, and that is why this book is lacking its final star.

I recommend this book to any young mind that enjoys coming-of-age stories, as this is one that may resemble well-known novels of the same genre, it is able to stand its own.

Miriam says

Totally great, almost surreal story about a boy genius who loses it six days before he is supposed to graduate from college (at age 18). I'm totally fascinated by extraordinary minds and this book really captures the anguish that can go along with being just a little bit different.

It's an adult book, but I think it would appeal to fans of YA as well.

Gigi says

this is one of the rare occasions when i wish i could call the author and vent my frustration about devoting hours of my life to their craft only to be shoved down a literary trap door. i am flat out annoyed by how ridiculous this story became. ridiculous and lazy and negligent.

when you meet the main character mead, you are at first tempted to not go on his journey because you're sure you've heard it all before. ten year old boy, wildly smart and ostracized by his peers, somewhere-ville small

town usa, parents with unrealized dreams who make all the wrong choices when trying to set it right for their kids. throw in a hearthrob older cousin who plays softball and a quarry where the kids make daring leaps all summer and you know where this story is going.

but you forge ahead, because in the opening chapters there is something compelling about the language and a hint of something new about this coming of age tale. and so you follow mead through incidents with bullies, puberty and embalming and then to college where he discovers girls, cd players and seduction at the hands of a wealthy, conniving elder classman who has problems of his own with old dad. blah blah blah. i am not going to talk about plot points because they're average at best.

and then, for no reason at all (although, perhaps, a feeble spin at holden caulfield's repeated use of "damn" or "and all"), mead starts saying "shit" every dozen sentences. literally. we're talking scores of "shit" littered all over the second half of the novel. standing alone or tossed in mid sentence. for instance: "time enough to get some work done, to finish mapping out that stupid outline for the dean. visiting mathematicians. shit. that's heady stuff." OR (not half a page later) "the dean has invited professional mathematicians, the most brilliant minds in the field, to come listen to me. me! shit i am going to look like a fool up there on that stage."

i struggled through the second half of the book (one must never put a book down once started), trying to avoid those "shits" like literary landmines. impossible. by the time i came to the end of the book (and to a finale that was actually more offensive than the landmines!), i felt like i had been pelted with cactus plants all afternoon.

in short: no go on Life After Genius.

Jeruen says

Awesome book this truly was. Oops, time to switch to the non-Yoda dialect.

Anyway, I should say that I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was very interesting and captivating that I blasted through it in just a couple of days.

So, this is a book that revolves around Theodore Mead Fegley, who is a math genius, genius enough to skip several grades in elementary, middle, and high school, and enters college at 15, and finishing his undergraduate in less than three years. Almost, since the book begins when he walks out of college a week before graduation, without delivering his senior thesis.

Several characters revolve around Theodore. His father, Lynn, is an undertaker, very quiet, refuses to accept a scholarship for his son and instead insists on paying for his college education on his own. His mother, Alayne, is this control freak, who thinks that Theodore is different from his father's side of the family, and dreams big for her son. She basically is the typical parent who wants their kids to do the things that they were unsuccessful in accomplishing. Theodore's aunt Jewel, used to be a very caring aunt, but now, after the death of their son Percy, she went into catatonic depression. Uncle Martin on the other hand is a fellow undertaker, managing the family business of a funeral home, and is harsh and cruel on Theodore, because he blames him for Percy's death. In short, every character in this book has their own skeletons in their closets.

I suppose it is difficult to recreate the conflicts that this book presents, as everyone seems to be blaming everyone for the existence of their skeletons. Theodore decides to have a new life once he enters college, so

he wants everyone to call him by his middle name now, which is Mead. This creates a divide in the arenas in the book: his family members still call him Teddy, his school associates call him Mead, while his arch-nemesis calls him Fegley.

Growing up, he battles the bullies, destroying his science project, embarrassing him to various degrees. He also battles the cutthroat people in college, people who would go into depths of crime and bribery just to get an A, like his "friend" Herman Weinstein, who turns out to be the person that he battles the most in the story.

The book presents a very good scenario for several psychological conflicts. It indeed is psychological fiction at its best, although I think it may have been a little over the top. There are too many abnormal people in the story, which I think is the only bad element of this book. But then again, who in the world is normal? We all have skeletons in our closet.

I have to say that I liked this book a lot, and found plenty of things in which I can relate. Mead has conflict with his parents: her mom only wants one thing, that is, to get him out of the small town of High Grove, Illinois by means of his genius. His father on the other hand secretly desires his son to be an undertaker like him and continue the family business. So there's the overprotective mother and the very impassive father. Their family dynamics are so extraordinary that I feel pity for Mead. It also made me appreciate the value of openness, and listening. Mead's parents didn't even listen to him, only insisting on what they think was best. Never did they realize that they had to listen to what Mead had to say as well, they only realized that late in the game, when their kid is all grown up. In the beginning, they were more willing to think that Mead was simply hallucinating instead of taking his word for the truth.

With respect to the structure of this book, I highly took a liking to it, since it wasn't the traditional chronological narration. Every chapter was dated, as to how many days or years it was before graduation. Thus, the chapters were in different time periods in Mead's life. It was presented based on content, and not based on the date. One chapter can be 8 years before graduation, when Mead was just 10, and the next can be 3 weeks before graduation, when his parents were in town visiting the university. In this way, I believe the author had trusted her readers that her readers would be smart enough to reconstruct the missing links in between the episodes. I liked that factor, since it needed use of my brain by requiring me to read between the lines.

I also liked the ending. The conflicts were slowly being resolved, one by one. One by one, Mead's family members get normal, and finally sees the light, in a way. However, the good thing is that the author did not fully end the story. The main conflict is between Mead and his relationship with Herman Weinstein, and the ending leaves it hanging, welcoming the reader's imagination to fill in the blanks.

Overall, a very awesome novel. 5 out of 5 stars.
