



# Raising Demons

*Shirley Jackson*

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## **Raising Demons** Shirley Jackson

Life Among the Savages charmed thousands with its insightful wit and contrasting warmth. In this sequel, Shirley Jackson continues her affectionate, hilarious, sophisticated tale of dubious parental equilibrium in the face of four children, assorted dogs and cats, and the uncounted heaps of small intrusive possessions which pile up in corners everywhere.

## **Raising Demons Details**

Date : Published November 1st 1994 by Academy Chicago Publishers (first published 1957)

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Author : Shirley Jackson

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# From Reader Review Raising Demons for online ebook

## Troy Blackford says

I could not be-LIEVE how funny this was. This was an incredible, insightful, highly personal family memoir. I didn't realize that I should have read 'Life Among the Savages' first, as it is chronologically antecedent. But that failure didn't diminish my enjoyment. I knew Shirley Jackson was one of the most gifted writers in the horror genre, establishing much of the modern tone and possessing one of the most distinctive, poetic, and lyrical voices the genre has ever seen. But I am \*flabbergasted\* at how hilarious and poignant and evocative this set of essays about her family life is. It doesn't seem fair, how good she is at these wildly different things. But she is. So highly recommended.

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## Lee Anne says

There's a scene in season one of "Mad Men" in which little Sally Draper is playing spaceman by wearing a dry cleaning bag over her head and entire body. When mom Betty sees her, she's angry...because "if my clothes from that dry cleaning bag are on the floor of my closet, you're going to be a very sorry young lady." This book is thrilling to read for its depiction of mid-century parenting, things you can actually get arrested for today. Baby Barry's car seat is in the front, while the other three children ride in the back, sans seat belts. Three year old Sally wanders to a neighbor's house to get breakfast when mom sleeps in and doesn't cook, then wanders back later. It makes one's head spin.

Anyway, if you only know Shirley Jackson from her required reading short story classic "The Lottery," or The Haunting of Hill House, this is the second of her two memoirs of the joys and miseries of wifedom and motherhood. All the Bombeckian (pre-Bombeck, I might add) touchstones are here: moving, clutter, Little League, appliances, husband's old girlfriends coming to town, pets, money. It's sweet, wistful, often very funny, and out of print.

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## Kimberly says

I absolutely loved this sequel to Living Among the Savages. Still just as charming and funny, I loved seeing a glimpse into the life of one of my favorite authors. Her stories are still told with the same wry wit and chilling grasp on human nature. I will definitely reread these!

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## Jenn Esteppe says

I've been doling little bits of this out to myself each night, savoring it. As expressed elsewhere, my joy on finding that it was finally in print again was sort of unparalleled. As a follow-up to Life Among the Savages, it doesn't quite live up to it's predecessor, but that is maybe because it wasn't such a joyful surprise as that one had been? (i.e. I knew what to expect this time around). And also, there were a few moments when her kids (exaggerated, I'm sure) made me a little bonkers. That said, it's lovely and funny and heartfelt and very contemporary and I wish that there was more.

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### **Melissa McShane says**

Re-read 3/26/17: Upped the rating to four stars, because I liked it better this time around, and because for some reason I was thinking of it in terms of how much her children must appreciate having these memories told so wonderfully. Even the stories where they come off sounding awful.

7/13/13: Much as I enjoyed this, I didn't like it as much as *Life Among the Savages*, probably because as Jackson's kids got older, it was increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that they're either brats or Jackson isn't a very good parent. Still, there are some excellent moments here, particularly her description of the new house they buy, her oldest son Laurie's one year in Little League, and the wild antics of their pets. Jackson is still brilliant and funny, and the book is well worth picking up.

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### **Linda says**

The writing is everything in this collection of stories of domestic life in the fifties. In a lesser woman's hands, it could have been cloying, twee garbage. Jackson's magic pen turns stories of a malfunctioning refrigerator or a lost sneaker into art. You never lose sight of the fact that this mother of four, who cooks and cleans and shops and chauffeurs her non-driving husband, would quite possibly chuck the whole thing for a solo apartment in NYC if the opportunity arose. And who could have blamed her?

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### **Kaethe says**

Jackson, writing about her four kids, husband, and small Vermont town, is hilarious. Although nothing in this book can top the disappearing pillow sequence in *Life Among the Savages*.

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### **Stephanie A. says**

While it has some of the same problems as the first book (with never-ending sentences and some superfluous paragraphs that ramble), I liked this one even more since the children were a bit older. It was the perfect nostalgic depiction of a (semi-chaotic) storybook 1940s/1950s household, full of kids and pets and one rather put-upon husband.

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### **ALLEN says**

Life in the Eisenhower Era, particularly in small towns, is usually thought of as placid if not downright dull. But not at the pen of the amazing Shirley Jackson, who concluded her mom-with-kids comic short stories that began in book form with the best-selling *Life Among the Savages* (1953) with this *Raising Demons* (1957). Only a mystery writer as gifted as Jackson could deal in the elements of horror and make them so

funny -- the mania for building clothespin dolls with a friend as a child -- the little old relative "a thousand years old" who lives in an antique cottage on a rose-covered hill, attended by a bevy of snow-white cats -- the children's dubious brushes with the local educational system -- the local mothers' growing obsession over the progress of the town's Little League season, which affected everyone except, thank heaven, the players themselves.

My advice is that the curious start their reading with the predecessor volume (LIFE AMONG THE SAVAGES) and then pick up RAISING DEMONS if the mood strikes. Some years ago, BOMC put these two comic works under one cover; barring that you'll have to read the books individually. For me it was a labor of love, and I've laughed through multiple readings of each.

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### **Holly says**

I remember trying to read Jackson's *Life Among the Savages* and this book in my 20s and then putting them aside unfinished, because I didn't perceive any EDGE. I've now returned to the two books, and discovered a little bit of edge - it's just discernible but it's there. I'm fascinated that this is the same writer who composed *The Lottery* and *Haunting at Hill House*.

It seems as if Jackson revealed more about her marriage in this book, or simply shared more feelings. This is not the story of a companionate marriage - this a 1950s American marriage and it's not egalitarian at all. Though some could probably read the entire book as lighthearted and quaint, I saw some seething anger and resentment peeking out under the patina of sweetness and incorrigible-yet-charming children. For example, Jackson's feelings about her husband's role in judging the Vermont beauty pageant, or his semi-hostile responses to her during his IRS tax audit, and their money problems, and his reliance on her to raise the children and cook his meals - I sensed this was a female artist trying to describe painful experiences that nobody thought to be problematic in the 1950s. I still don't know anything about Jackson's actual life beyond these two books - what was really going on and who was she? So I am now eager to read Ruth Franklin's acclaimed biography.

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### **Annie Rosewood says**

Just like *Life Among the Savages*, I did not want this to ever end. I laughed out loud so many times and I now feel like Shirley is an old friend - the absolutely hilarious, witty, clever kind that is so rare to find.

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### **Hannah Garden says**

Oh my gosh, there's no better expression for this book than just total freaken absolute BUNDLE OF JOY. This book is just a bundle of damn joy, man. I will certainly read its companion, *Life Among the Savages*. "Raising Demons" is, in fact, Shirley Jackson's title for a book about raising her children. And if you know anything about Shirley Jackson, you might wonder what in heaven's name is in store for you here. Because she can be creepy as hell. Which I love, I mean that's what we go to Shirley Jackson for, I'm not saying I wouldn't have been pleased if it HAD been creepy. But it's not, it's so funny, and so sweet, and so helpless and so stiff-upper. I think Barry's lines especially had me laughing out loud on the train, and her portrayal of her husband is a goddamn delight. Thanks Oriana!

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## Justin Tate says

Raising Demons is a seamless sequel to Life Among the Savages and just as good. Maybe better. The story continues shortly after the other left off, with various anecdotes about raising Laurie, Sally, Jannie and Barry. Why it ever went out of print is a mystery. If ever there was a timeless classic novel, this is it.

Shirley's observant eye for humor in everyday life shines brilliantly, with simple prose that feels homey and familiar. You love her, her children and all the characters involved. Best of all, she isn't afraid to poke fun at herself. The bit about the birthday card is a knee-slapping good time. When the book ends, you want to cry because these people have become so important in your life that you can't imagine not hearing about the next story, the next hilarious good time.

Life Among the Savages and Raising Demons are so distinctly different from Jackson's most famous works (Hill House, Castle, The Lottery) in terms of genre that one cannot help imagine what vast bibliography Shirley Jackson could have written had she not been taken from the world so soon. Nevertheless, she accomplished more than any writer could hope for in her handful of brilliant novels, short stories and memoirs. This one should not be missed.

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## Oriana says

A few years ago my sister broke her jaw. (She fell off a ladder; don't ask.) Among many other things, this resulted in one of my all-time favorite photos of the two of us—this is what I texted my folks at 4am to let them know she was okay.

So good, right? Anyway, I unearthed this book from the very bottom of a very large stack as a possible candidate to read to her while she was recovering from surgery. And it was such such such a perfect choice! With the possible exception of *The Amazing Mackerel Pudding Plan*, this may well be the funniest book ever written. Plus it's so clever, so silly, so warm and sweet. Just totally extraordinary.

It's a book of stunning minutia, where the seemingly simplest things—a Little League game, getting a new dog, making a family dinner, finding a missing sneaker—really just *bubble* with life and love and joy and fun. Shirley Jackson has just got an impeccable ear for speech and an unsurpassable sense of story, rendering with stunning deftness detailed conversations with her children (in all their non-sequiturian glory) and the many hilarious episodes in her family's day-to-day small-town life. It is absolutely mind-boggling to think that this kind, sweet, gentle, sarcastic woman is the same person from whose brain sprung "The Lottery" and other such disturbing pieces.

Here's the cast. Shirley herself, a very poised, often self-deprecating but extremely perceptive wife and mother of four. Her husband, an English professor at a nearby women's college, coin collector, and extremely sarcastic wit, who is regularly bewildered by his entire family. Then the kids: Laurie, about

thirteen, the protective older brother who loves baseball and building stuff and is always being fined by his dad for pronouncing things to be 'real cool' or 'flipped'; Jannie, maybe ten, in her mind a future beauty queen (or princess, hopefully), who is quite smart and often funny; Sally, about five, who speaks in the most delicious "odd jangling manner", which usually means repeating the central theme of each sentence at its end, as in, "Laurie is on his bike, and Jannie has been eaten by bears, eaten"; and finally Barry, two, whose constant companion is a blue teddy bear named Dikidiki.

And look, I should mention that this is not the kind of book I would *ever* think to read. I mean, it's a memoir by a fifties housewife about life with her family in a small town in Vermont. I *hate* the perceived preciousness of small-town life. I *hate* women who think their little babies' foibles are worth transcribing in agonizing detail. And I *really* hate – or am at least made distinctly uncomfortable by – fifties housewives who simper and oblique, describe themselves as 'helpless little women', and defer to their husbands on everything. Truth be told, I have absolutely no idea what possessed me to pick this up in the first place, given the above. But honestly? None of that matters. Shirley Jackson is just brilliant, in every way, and I don't care *what* she's writing about – it's just so much fun to listen to and be a part of. I did wind up deciding to read a few little selections to my sister – just a paragraph or two here or there – but each time I started, she didn't let me stop for twenty or thirty pages! I'm avoiding transcribing passages here for the same reason: if I started, I'd have to type up the whole damn book. Shirley Jackson is just superb.

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## tee says

This is a review of both *Life Among The Savages* and *Raising Demons*, as I read a volume that had both in it.

Usually I read to escape from life and the problem I had with this book is that I was reading about housework and it's mundanity, raising children and it's frustrations - and then I'd put the book down to do exactly that in-real-life. I feel all chored out and I haven't even done any housework today. I do use the word 'frustrations' lightly. Jackson hardly even implied that raising four children, looking after a house, husband and pets - as frustrating. She seemed to find it great fun and not tedious at all. Surely there has to be 'The Secret Diaries of Shirley Jackson' somewhere and they'd be more Plath than positivity.

I think I may have been more interested in her stories if I had read her other work. It's a pity that her world seemed to consist of children and housework and we didn't get to see, well, any of *her*. Though, they would have been a riot to read if I actually knew her personally, the folk in her small town must've been thrilled to get their hands on this. Well the voyeuristic, nosy ones at least.

I found Shirley Jackson to be a very witty writer, her sentences bounce from one to the next, she's really easy to read. Sometimes it got really tedious though. Like a book compiled simply of lists - have you ever read something like that? List after list. Now, I like lists, but I can hardly sit down and read a book composed of them- they'd have to be extremely thrilling, riveting lists. And riveting, Jackson's life is not. I don't think she left the house bar to run errands in all 810 pages. Well, there was the four or five days in NYC which was really, just more of the same.

She had a rather irritating habit of describing the absolute tedious, mundanities of her daily life. The first time it was funny; I related. Picking up the socks, then picking up the towel, putting the towel in the hamper, and the socks in the hamper, then picking up the bathmat and then putting the bathmat over the edge of the bath - ah, yes, I know what that is like. But I found my eyes glazing over when she wrote such things one too

many times. But then I'm someone who prefers to read about drug addiction and eating disorders than happy family life.

Here's an excerpt taken from "Life Among the Savages" that explains precisely what I mean; funny on first reading, exhausting on the fifth and torturous by the twentieth time that this formula is used.

*My husband caught the grippe first, on a Friday, and snarled and shivered and complained until I prevailed upon him to go to bed. By Friday night both Laurie and Sally were feverish, and on Saturday Jannie and I began to cough and snuffle. In our family we take ill in different manners; my husband is extremely annoyed at the whole procedure and is convinced that his being sick is somebody's fault, Laurie tends to become a little light-headed and strew handkerchiefs around his room, Jannie coughs and coughs and coughs, Sally turns bright red, and I suffer in stoical silence, so long as everyone knows clearly that I am sick. We are each of us privately convinced that our own ailment is far more severe than anyone else's. At any rate, on Saturday night I put all the children into their beds, gave each of them half an aspirin and the usual fruit juice, covered them warmly, and then settled my husband down for the night with his tumbler of water and his cigarettes and matches and ashtray; he had decided to sleep in the guest room because it was warmer. At about ten o'clock I checked to see that all the children were covered and asleep and that Toby was in his place on the bottom half of the double-decker. I then took two sleeping pills and went to sleep in my own bed in my own room. Because my husband was in the guest room I slept on his side of the bed, next to the bed-table. I put my cigarettes and matches on the end table next to the ashtray, along with a small glass of brandy, which I find more efficacious than cough medicine."*

Six(!) pages later, she is still caught up in listing the procedures of them being sick in (I imagine) a monotone drivel. She describes how Sally went into their bed, she went into the spare bed, her husband joined her, then left, the dog took his place, Jannie ended up with the whiskey beside her, Laurie slept in the baby's cot - so on and so forth, and suddenly it wasn't funny anymore. And I was scared, because I was only 136 pages into the book.

I must admit though, her children seem extraordinarily funny and bright. If I were to write memoirs of the activities that happens in my daily life - they'd pale in comparison. My son merely drives his matchbox cars around/demands to eat sugar/watches Ben10. My daughter is only one, so she spends a lot of time screeching and drooling. That is it. I think my son has said one witty thing in his four years of existence and it involved asking what his toenails were made out of. If my children were Shirley Jackson's kids, I probably would have gathered three or four anecdotes in the time I've spent writing this review.

All in all, a light, easy read - I would recommend "Life Among the Savages" over "Raising Demons", but I'd probably recommend reading it in between reading a more exciting book. And really, I don't think it'd be of interest to anyone but housewives with children. Even then, as I've said, it's hardly a book you can escape from your life to. So maybe don't read it. I think I read somewhere that certain parts of her novels were printed in Women's Weekly's and such, which is where I think they belong. Reading a column of her life each week - well I'd look forward to it. In book-form, I just felt a little overwhelmed and daunted. I think that may have more to do with me and my aversion to housework and the tedium of family life, than Shirley Jackson though. My book reviews have all been taking a negative dive lately, so it could very well be my state-of-mind, rather than the books themselves. See, I also agree whole-heartedly with Oriana's review as well - read that for a review which I whole-heartedly agree with; Oriana rates it five stars and gives it a glowing review - which I would too, probably, if I weren't such an utter, depressive asshole.

I must say, I would have loved to have known her in real life. She seems like such a large character of a



woman, sharp and hilarious. It sounds like she always had a delicious batch of cookies or puddings on the ready. And I do have a thing for how women in the 50's chain smoked with such zest (she mentions lighting a cigarette in the taxi on the way to the hospital .. pregnant, in labour!) Her kids could teach mine a thing or two too.

(Upon completion of this review, my son came over and coughed up a chunk of his sandwich onto my leg, see? Not something I want to extend into a 900 tome of a book, props to Jackson for having more creative, intelligent offspring).

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## **V. Briceland says**

To anyone familiar with any of Shirley Jackson's novels of horror, or her tales of psychological disintegration, or at least her most famous spine-chilling short story, "The Lottery," the notion that the same author penned two light-hearted book-length domestic memoirs might seem preposterous. Jackson's trenchant sense of humor, however, was always the leaven to her more macabre sensibilities; her rich appreciation of the absurd is, in fact, the engine to most of her writing. Even in the territory of less adept, more middle-brow writers, Jackson still manages to veer more left of center than you might expect. Her persona seems less akin to a typical New England mother and housewife and more (as implied by the title of her first memoir) to an anthropologist recording aboriginal customs, if not an outright alien spacewoman observing quaint Earthling rituals.

Both *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons* are thoroughly enjoyable on their own merits. *Demons* is the more seamless of the two; it's obvious that from *Savages* she learned how to make the joins between previously-published magazine essays less noticeable.

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## **Judy says**

Shirley Jackson's follow-up to *Life Among the Savages* covers the middle years of her children's lives. I loved every page. She is a consummate writer. The family moves to a larger home, acquires more cats and dogs, while Shirley learns the mixed emotions that come with being a faculty wife.

Once again I was amazed at the amount of humor and true affection for children that she brought to this further account of her family life. It is such a contrast to her spooky novels and the troubled characters she created for them.

Though I only had two children our house was always full of neighborhood kids. I also ran a daycare for a while. So I was right at home with the barely controlled chaos she describes. Her four children are as precocious as ever and she brings their characters to full life, especially in the way she has recorded their speech.

A huge amount of sheer energy propels this book. I got the sense of a woman driving a run-away buggy, just barely hanging on, who can only laugh at the crazy life she is having. Singlehandedly, she created a whole genre carried on by Jean Kerr and Erma Brombeck, not to mention Ayelet Waldman.

The final chapter is an account of their family Christmas: the hiding of gifts, the last minute special mail

order, the decorating of the tree and the joy of the kids. It was so moving that I wanted to start a family all over again. Parenthood is possibly one of the hardest jobs in life and while Ms Jackson had as hard a time as any mother, I salute her for capturing the frustrations, rewards and humor of it all.

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### **Robert says**

Unlike all the other SJ books I've been reading these past few months, I don't know that I'd ever before read this in its entirety. Being the sequel to *Life Among the Savages*, *Raising Demons* suffers a bit from a sense of been there done that; most of the best of her family stories are in the previous book, and with two of Jackson's four kids being much older here, the material just doesn't have those same sparks (she was a master at capturing the peculiar rhythms and habits of young children in particular). There's also a palpable sense of overwhelm that occasionally peeks through the generally light tone, highlighting the frustration that Jackson must have felt trying to keep her writing career going while tending to her boisterous, demanding family—this adds a tension, but one that I feel she tried to gloss over more than use to her advantage, storytelling-wise. The book certainly has its moments, including a very funny tale of a chaotic family trip to New York, and especially the closing piece, where the Jackson-Hymans unpack the Christmas decorations together, preparing for the holiday and the long winter ahead. In these and other stories Jackson captures domestic life with great humor, charm, and perception.

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### **Diana Tilson says**

These books are over too soon. I wish Shirley Jackson had written more of them, and that her children had written a follow-up compendium so that readers would know what they are doing now...

This was the second of these books (*My Life Among the Savages* was the first) but I actually found this one even more satisfying. I couldn't read it on the train because it made me laugh out loud too often, so I had to read it in the privacy of my home where I could give myself over fully to giggling.

These are out of print now, but I wish someone would reissue them.

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### **Kevin says**

This is some seriously wholesome apple-pie Americana mom-oir writing with just a dose of weird and I *love* it. I can't even begin to fathom that it's from the same Shirley Jackson that we know as ... well, Shirley Jackson.

I don't know how to say it all again but I'll try by using different words. It's a series of sincere and genuinely funny stories about her kids and her husband and her pets, back in the late 1940s or early 1950s. Baseball and cooking and running a household and tree houses and paper dolls and cats and dogs and somehow relating all of this in a fashion that had me laugh out loud probably once per story.

Nothing in here will change your life but it's such unaffected and pleasant reading that I feel obligated to recommend it next time you want something soothing to read before bed.

