

***Hide and Seek/Hidden and Found—In Search Of A Balanced Life: Memoirs, Stories and Essays***

**by Howard L. Schwartz, M.D.**

*Reviewed by Carol L. Skolnick*

“This,” warns psychiatrist Howard L. Schwartz, in quoting the essayist Michel de Montaigne, “is an honest book.” Montaigne, as he was the first to admit, wrote to please no one but himself. I suspect Schwartz, the psychoanalyst, son, husband, father and adoring grandfather, aims to please both us and his family more than a bit with this, his colorful patchwork quilt of a publication. However, like Montaigne, what he offers is not a memoir per se, but a compilation of *Essais*, meaning “trials” or “trying on ideas.” While more a labor of love than a book bound for bestsellerdom, it does contain a keel that keeps the articles and chapters in line with a destination that has no end: the quest for self-understanding. Schwartz does this through memories, letters, fantasies, allegory, book reviews, dream work, photos . . . and even a eulogy for his best friend. But *Hide and Seek/Hidden and Found* is no mere scrapbook; rather, it is a work in progress, even though, like analysis, it can never truly end.

“Remember,” the narrator of his *Kenny and Benny* stories tells young Kenny in a letter Schwartz could have written to his own grandkids, “When you have children someday, to tell them all about your family: tell them everything you know.” Of course, memory is an unreliable narrator, and the good doctor is self-aware enough to realize that he has colored the world of his past with imagination, projection and free-association. “Where are you from?” a young Howard would ask his world-weary immigrant father, and the answer was always “Nowhere.” Schwartz “essays” to create a somewhere (more than a name of a long-gone town in Eastern Europe that had been part of Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia) for himself that begins with his identity, in no small part his father’s legacy to him of being a good and faithful family man as well as a Jew. A particularly moving chapter begins with a night dream of the author bonding with, but failing to ride a gentle chestnut mare before it’s time for the stable to close, and moves to an image of spending the Jewish High Holy Days with his father, at the concluding service of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

“The service concludes with repeated chanting at sundown of ‘The gates are closing . . . but prayer, repentance and charity (may) avert the severe decree.’

“These prayers, pleadings and warnings, seated beside my father as a boy in an orthodox schul, bored and playing with the fringes of his tallit, are part of my identity. My secular, humanistic Jewish identity does not undo that identity. Perhaps it merely resides in my unconscious as a plea to a stable gatekeeper for more time to ride a tired, but still willing horse who nuzzles me, to grant me a little longer to complete unfinished tasks and time with those I love.” (p. 20.)

It's no secret that this book is a way for Schwartz to live on; as he learned from the humanistic psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor Anna Ornstein, "People are only truly dead when there is no memory of them." In retelling the story of his father as he knows it and partly creates it—perhaps in writing all of this book—Schwartz hopes to "avert the severe decree" of death a bit longer, if not forever. Because *Hide and Seek/Hidden and Found* is above all an exercise in self-analysis, Schwartz favors honesty over accuracy, feelings over facts in the way he tells his stories. His memoirs are therefore based on "screen memories," a term from psychoanalysis that speaks to memories that may or may not be based on actual events but on images of the past, remembered or perhaps formed in the present from past feelings, in which old desires and conflicts may be better understood and perhaps resolved.

I will admit to being most partial, as an audience, to the parts of the book that provide glimpses into Schwartz's life, from his tender years in the heavily Jewish Weequahic section of Newark, New Jersey (familiar to fans of Philip Roth's novels) . . . to his stint as a Navy psychiatrist during the Vietnam war, moonlighting to earn enough income and conflicted about his duties as a Reservist versus his wish to best serve his shell-shocked patients . . . to his regret in not admitting to a beloved teenaged granddaughter begging for special recognition that, at least in the moment, she was indeed his favorite. His memories are vivid, evocative of a more innocent era, sometimes sexy and often heart-rending. However there is also much to admire in the threads of self-analysis that weave throughout the book, whether Schwartz is dissecting Tolstoy or paying homage to *The Catcher in the Rye*, invoking mythology or creating fictional characters like the brothers Kenny and Benny (representative of the relationship young Howard wished he had had with his younger brother), revealing his ambivalence about his mother or his passion for his wife.

In sum, *Hide and Seek/Hidden and Found* is a unique self-festschrift to a life well-lived. "I don't feel good about any of this," admits Schwartz in his candid confessional about his relationship with his brother, "except for my ability to be honest with myself." As a patient or analysand, this is all anyone can hope for. As readers looking into Schwartz's life story and self-analysis, we can feel good about his honesty, insights and mastery of language as well.

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*Carol L. Skolnick is a writer, freelance copywriter and editor. A native New Yorker, she now lives and works in Santa Cruz, CA.*