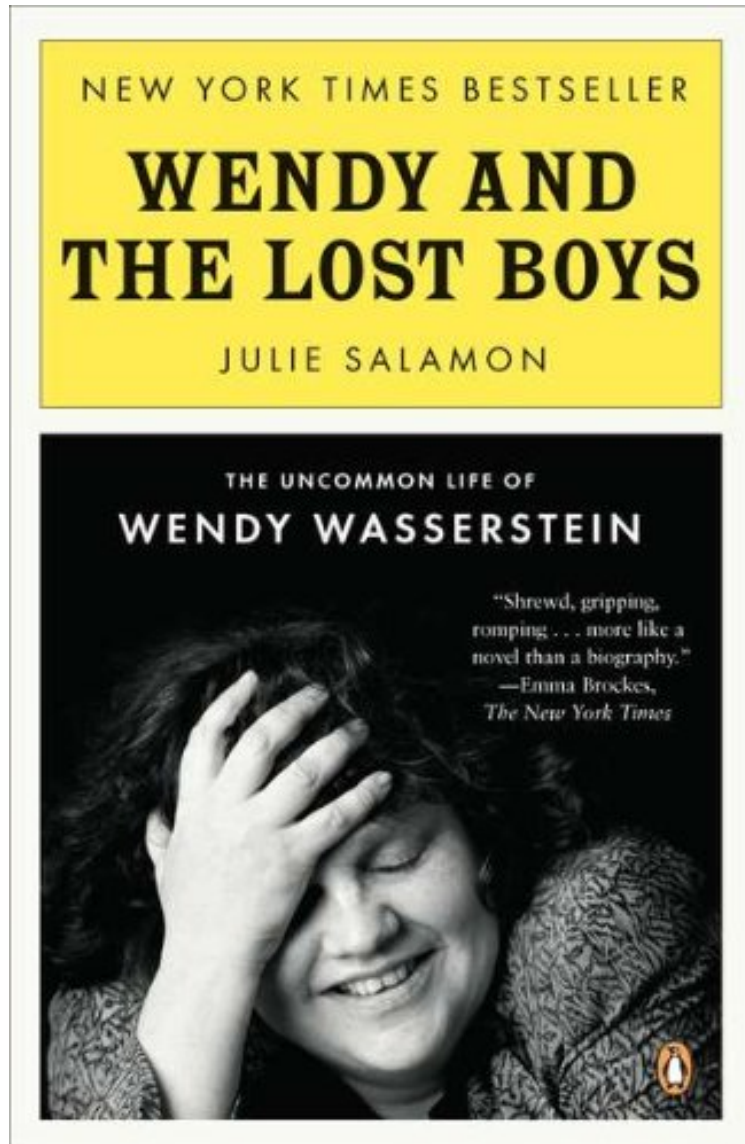


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## Wendy and the Lost Boys: The Uncommon Life of Wendy Wasserstein

Julie Salamon

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**Julie Salamon : Wendy and the Lost Boys: The Uncommon Life of Wendy Wasserstein** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wendy and the Lost Boys: The Uncommon Life of Wendy Wasserstein:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. FASCINATING CONTENT ABOUT A COMPLICATED

WOMANBy ReaderBut ok, who isn't complicated? It was a thoroughly researched work about a time and place I remember fondly; my college years at NYU when Chris Durang, Andre and Wendy were the stars of the New York theater world. I never knew her and it was fascinating to find out about a person who at times I adored and at times I found cold and manipulative - as I am sure she herself was manipulated. We want to think of idols as perfect. This is not that kind of book. It's an honest look behind the curtain and for that it deserves a read. That is not to say it shines an unflattering light on her - it merely tells the truth about what it was like to be her, as much as a book can. My one issue is the title - a reference to Peter Pan that, while seemingly clever, was not worth misleading the reader and does no justice to its subject. This book is about Wendy and her life and yes there are men in it, and women and children who all play important roles. It seems strange to me to give short shrift to the whole of her by titling it something indicating an ensemble piece. It is not. It is simply the uncommon life of Wendy Wasserstein. I hope she knew what it was like to be truly loved and more important what it was like to truly and selflessly love back. 39 of 41 people found the following review helpful. Wonderfully familiar, and sadly unfamiliarBy Jim CavanaughThe Wendy I knew, in her student days and throughout her amazing but too-short career, appears in all her ruffled, talented, giggling and ultra-loyal best in Ms. Salamon's well-researched and beautifully-written bio. But it's the insecure, self-doubting, loved-but-unloved, overwhelmingly secretive Wendy about whom I knew nothing - Nothing - whom I'm meeting in this clear-cut, frank yet compassionate, brilliant character study. Wendy's unbelievable family, her lifelong and career-long Best Friends (but no husband, or acknowledged father to her daughter), and the blue-ribbon assemblage of the late 20th-century American theatre's movers and shakers, stars, producers and playwrights, are all brought fully dimensionally to life in Ms. Salamon's easy-to-read but highly literate prose. No Pulitzer-and-Tony-Award Winner ever had a life filled with more highs and lows, nor hid it so well, nor was fortunate enough to have had that life warmly gathered into the understanding hands of an author of this calibre. Wendy complained through her plays that women had been lied to, that they could Not "have it all." But here in "Wendy and the Lost Boys," WE have the opportunity to "have it all," all about Wendy's sad and happy, always intriguing life. - - - - Jim Cavanaugh, Emeritus Professor of Theatre Arts, Mount Holyoke College4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Oy, what a life...and the book it deservesBy Lesley DormenWendy Wasserstein and Julie Salamon are a match made in bio heaven. I loved this book for its knowing grasp of how Wendy Wasserstein, her work and her life, became a mirror for so many boomer concerns--especially for we women of a certain age who found ourselves caught between the demands of our families and our personal ambitions and struggled mightily to define ourselves. I loved it for showing exactly how an artist's life, good and bad, creates her. You needn't be a fan of WW's work to appreciate how that life--her crazy family, her vulnerability about her appearance, her pleasures in and doubts about her innate talent, her capacity for and need of complicated friendships as a replacement for family, the secrets she kept, the steely ambition beneath the girlish giggle--informed her work. I loved Salamon's insight into Wendy's fierce love for and competition with her powerful brother Bruce. As a transplanted New Yorker and a (Jewish, female) writer myself, I loved the gossip element of this book--the glimpses of all those boldfaced names that peopled Wendy's world during these tumultuous decades. I loved the way Salamon gives us a close-up view of how artists who happen to come up through the ranks at a particular moment in time (Ivy League, East Coast division in this case) create and define a cultural moment. Any woman who has wished her gay best friend could also be her mate will identify with Wendy's difficulties finding a life partner. Salamon's account of WW's desire for a child, accomplished in a third act cut way too short, is particularly moving. I didn't know Wendy Wasserstein though I might have, brushing up as I did against the worlds she walked through. But I hated finishing this book. I felt as if I'd lost a friend. Bravo.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, the first woman playwright to win a Tony Award, Wendy Wasserstein was a Broadway luminary. But with her high-pitched giggle and unkempt curls, she projected an image of warmth and familiarity. Everyone knew Wendy Wasserstein. Or thought they did. In *Wendy and the Lost Boys*, Salamon delicately pieces together the many fractured narratives of Wendy's life stories (often contradictory) that she shared amongst friends and family, the half truths of her plays and essays, the confessions and camouflage present even in her own journal writing--to reveal Wendy's most expertly crafted character: herself. Born in Brooklyn on October 18, 1950 to Polish Jewish immigrant parents, Wendy was the youngest of Lola and Morris Wasserstein's five children. Her mother had big dreams for her children, and they didn't disappoint: Sandra, Wendy's glamorous sister, became a high-ranking corporate executive at a time when Fortune 500 companies were an impenetrable boys club. Their brother Bruce became a billionaire superstar of the investment banking world. Yet behind the family's remarkable success was a fiercely guarded world of private tragedies. Wendy perfected the family art of secrecy while cultivating a densely populated inner circle. Her long time friends included theater elite such as playwright Christopher Durang, Lincoln Center Artistic Director Andr Bishop, New York Times theater critic Frank Rich, the many women of the theater for whom she served as both mentor and ally, and countless others. Yet almost no one knew that Wendy was pregnant when, at age forty-eight, she was rushed to Mount Sinai Hospital to deliver Lucy Jane three months premature. The paternity of her daughter remains a mystery. At the time of Wendy's tragically early death less than six years later, very few were aware that she was gravely ill. The cherished confidante to so many, Wendy privately endured her greatest

heartbreaks alone. At once a moving portrait of an uncommon woman, and a nuanced study of the generation she came to represent, *Wendy and The Lost Boys* uncovers the magic of Wendys work. A daughter of the 1950s, an artist that came of age during the freewheeling 1970s, a power woman in 1980s New York, and a single mother at the turn of the century, Wendys very life spoke to the tensions of an era of great change, for women in particular. Salamon brings each distinct moment to vibrant life, always returning to Wendys works *The Heidi Chronicles* and others to show her in the free space of the theater. Here Wendy spoke in the most intimate of terms about everything that matters most: family and love, dreams and devastation. And that is the Wendy of Neverland, the Wendy who will never grow old.

.com An Interview with Julie Salamon, author of the new book, *Wendy and the Lost Boys: The Uncommon Life of Wendy Wasserstein*. Q: Why did you title the book *Wendy and the Lost Boys*? Julie Salamon: As the research progressed, I noticed that the classic story, *Peter Pan*, became a recurrent motif. Wendy was one of the many Baby Boom babies named for Wendy Darling, Peters beloved friend, after the book became a popular Broadway musical starring Mary Martin. Wendy performed in the play as a girl, choreographed a dance for an avant-garde version in college, and named her daughter Lucy Jane (Jane was the name chosen by Peters Wendy for her little girl). For Wendys peers, *Peter Pan* became emblematic of a generation that tried to retain eternal youth, and then had to contend with the realities of aging and responsibility. Moreover, Wendys life was filled with lost boys, including a brother who was mentally disabled (and who was pretty much dropped from conversation within the family and who was separated from the family at an early age). Her lost boys included the gay men of the theater who became her closest circle, even as they all lived through vast changes in their lives and personal relationships. Q: Wendy came from an extremely successful family; can you describe what shaped her as a young girl growing up? Salamon: Wendy was born in 1950, to immigrant parents, just five years after the end of World War II; her family was caught up in the postwar desire to achieve the success that would make them safe. Her mother Lola, in particular, had a fierce personality and powerful ambition. Lola instilled the paradox that would become a recurrent theme in Wendys life and her work, the feeling of being better than everyone else but also not quite good enough. In *The Heidi Chronicles*, Wendy refers to the phenomenon of being superior-inferior. The playwright was also profoundly shaped by the times she lived in. In her youth, the 60s roared through New York, calling everything into question. The world was changing fast, creating a charged and exciting atmosphere of provocation and creativity: Civil rights, pop art, the Beatles, feminism, pacifism and protest. It was a pivotal moment, the line of demarcation between conformity and rebellion, stability and chaos. Q: Wendy's story reflects the accomplishments--as well as the fear and anxiety--of women who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s. How was she affected by the changing roles and attitudes of women, and how did her work reflect those changes? Salamon: Her work--plays, essays and a final novel--reflected her life and her life reflected the times she lived in. *Uncommon Women and Others* deals with the youthful dreams of young women who came of age as societys demands and expectations were undergoing a vast transformation. In subsequent plays, notably *Isnt It Romantic* and *The Heidi Chronicles*, she dealt with the complex choices women confronted as they faced competing desires for home and family and successful careers. In essays dealing with her family and her decision to have a baby as a single mother, she acknowledged the longing for home, while struggling to find her place in society that hadnt found a way to satisfy competing desire. Her final play, *Third*, contends with the disillusionment and reflection of a woman in middle age, contending with children, career, and aging parents. Q: You characterize Wendy as at once extremely social and yet mystifyingly private--can you elaborate? Salamon: After Wendy died, her close friend, the former New York Times columnist Frank Rich, wrote, How could the most public artist in New York keep so much locked up? I dont think I was the only friend who felt I had somehow failed to see Wendy whole. She gave the illusion, in her writing and in her relationships, that she made her life an open book. It was only after she died that people began to realize how much she kept hidden. As with so much in her life, the source of her secrecy was her mother. Lola Wasserstein suffered many losses, and survived by forging ahead, not dwelling on past wounds. The family joked that, when people died, it was said They went to Europe. Wendys reaction to her upbringing was to hide in plain sight--giving the illusion of revelation, while keeping the most crucial information locked inside. Q: Your portrait of Wendy reveals a remarkable driven yet remarkably insecure woman--what do you think accounts for that insecurity? Salamon: One of Wendys friends once said: Wendy was a very driven person, and yet she was a very warm person. Sometimes those things came into conflict. Much of her insecurity derived from the ambition that led her into the highly competitive world of theater. The vicious dumpling as one friend called her, wasnt really very vicious but she had inherited her mothers urge for self-preservation. Balancing her wish to be loved with her lofty goals was a high wire act. A more profound source of her insecurity was the absence of her mentally-disabled brother Abner, who she didnt meet until she was almost fifty years old. The familys secrecy about him and other matters kept Wendy off-balance, unable to fully trust her own sense of reality. And then there was Lola, always quick to remind her daughter that she wasnt svelte enough, she wasnt married, and she didnt have children (until late in the game). Wendy often told the story of Lolas response to her daughter winning the Pulitzer Prize: Id be just as happy if she brought home a husband. Q: Bruce Wasserstein was a famous character in his own right, a Wall Street titan--what was her relationship with her

brother? Salamon: While I was working on the book, a Wall Street guy cornered me at a party and said: I want you to find out how the same DNA produced Bruce and Wendy. This was a frequent refrain. He became a billionaire, known as a pugnacious investment banker with little regard for social (or business) niceties. She was beloved as both playwright and person, considered a best friend even by people who barely knew her. Yet they were more alike than different in their ambition, their willingness to disregard convention, their extreme desire for privacy. They were very close, though their separate orbits often led to fractiousness. I cant help wondering whether what I say has any relevance for him at all, she once wrote. In the end, though, when she was dying, Wendy turned to her brother and his wife to care for Lucy Jane. Q: What drove Wendy, at age 48, to give birth to her daughter, and how did motherhood affect her? Salamon: Throughout her life Wendy expressed yearning for a family. In a little-known play called "Miami," about her childhood, the adolescent character based on Wendy discusses the conflict she feels, between wanting to be a star and wanting children. She was quite close to her nieces and nephews and discussed having children with various men in her life. On the other hand, her actions often contradicted this desire. She repeatedly fell in love with unavailable men, many of them gay. For years she underwent in-vitro fertilization, but never engaged wholeheartedly in the process. By the time her daughter was born, Wendy was 48 years-old and already showing signs of the illness that eventually killed her. Much as she loved Lucy Jane, Wendy was often too ill or too preoccupied with her writing to enjoy being a mother as much as she had hoped. Q: What was the theatrical scene like in the 70s and 80s when Wendy came of age as a playwright? Salamon: Wendy came of age as a playwright as the nonprofit theater world hugely expanded. She became one of the original group of playwrights at Playwrights Horizons who brought a Baby Boom mentality to theater, and help create a sense of excitement and relevance for a new generation of theatergoers. In telling Wendys story, Wendy and the Lost Boys also recalls the formative years of Wendys group, which included James Lapine, Stephen Sondheims longtime collaborator; Andre Bishop, who became artistic director of Lincoln Center after putting Playwrights Horizons on the map; playwrights Christopher Durang and William Finn. Frank Rich, then the New York Times drama critic (and who became known as the Butcher of Broadway) was a dear friend of Wendy, a friendship often looked at with raised eyebrows by her theater friends, many of whom were on the receiving end of Richs lacerating prose. Q: What do you think her legacy will be in the theater? Will her plays pass the test of time? Salamon: Her plays were, in many ways, bright sociological commentaries on her times, though "Uncommon Women and Others," and "The Sisters Rosensweig," contain enduring themes about friendship and families. Certainly her success as a woman playwright continues to be an inspiration, considering how much less notably women have progressed in the theater world compared with other professions, including the arts. Julie Salamon is available for further interviews. Please contact: Elisabeth Calamari at 212-366-2857 or Elisabeth.calamari@us.penguin.com. (Photo of Julie Salamon Sara Krulwich) [Salamons] fresh reporting . . . gives the book a live, romping air, very much keeping with its subject . . . Wendy and the Lost Boys reads more like a novel than a biography. THE NEW YORK TIMESExcellent Salamons voice is like that of a Wasserstein character, a late-night girlfriend who tells you the truth, but confidentially, and sideways. THE NEW YORKERTop-notch penetrating biography. The book, less a literary reckoning with Wassersteins legacy than a frank character study, is superbly paced. [T]he work unfolds with an alacrity that had me fearing the end not just because it was such a tartly compelling read but because it's still so hard to accept a theatrical world without Wasserstein around to make it seem so much more magical. THE LOS ANGELES TIMESIntriguing PEOPLE MagazineEngaging new biography THE ECONOMISTJulie Salamon is a helluva journalist and her Wendy and the Lost Boys: The Uncommon Life of Wendy Wasserstein is a helluva story. NEW YORK DAILY NEWSPerceptive and empathetic, but also gently unsparinga superbly nuanced portrait KIRKUS (starred review)About the AuthorJulie Salamon is the author of Hospital, about Maimonides Hospital, as well as The New York Times bestseller The Christmas Tree; the true-crime book Facing the Wind; the novel White Lies; the film classic The Devils Candy; a family memoir, The Net of Dreams; and Rambams Ladder. Previously a reporter and critic with The Wall Street Journal, she has also written for The New York Times, The New Yorker, Vanity Fair, Vogue, and The New Republic.