



Lea Rachel

Author

Lea Rachel comes from a literary background, with published authors on both sides of her family tree. She has been writing short stories since the time she was a little girl, and achieved her first published works while in college at the University of Michigan, in the literary publications Prism and The Write Stuff.

Lea Rachel has attended the University of Iowa's Summer Writers' Workshops, she placed fifth (out of over 18,000 entries) in the 72nd Writer's Digest Writing Competition, and her first novel *The Other Shakespeare* earned an honorable mention in The Wishing Shelf Book Awards.

Originally from Detroit, Michigan, Lea Rachel now lives in St. Louis, Missouri with her husband and son, and teaches during the day at The University of Missouri-St. Louis.

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About the Book

Seeking Forgiveness

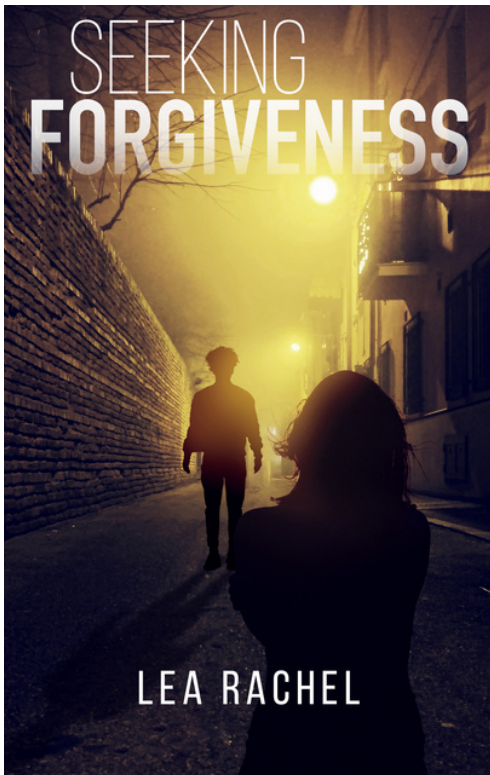
Overview

The narrative memoir *Seeking Forgiveness* tells the story of interracial adoption in the United States today, from the perspective of a white mother who adopts a Black son, and finds she has no idea what the hell she is doing.

Rachel, the adoptive mother of Miles, receives a call from the police in the middle of the night informing her that her son has been arrested. She rushes to the police station to help Miles, consumed with worry that she has failed to protect her son from events beyond his control.

For the next eight hours, as Rachel desperately tries to get Miles out of jail, she recalls their life together and the events that have led them to their current situation. In so doing she questions her competence as a mother, the viability of interracial adoption, and whether her son will ever forgive her for the mistakes she made as his adoptive mother.

A rich commentary on motherhood, adoption, and race relations in America today, this suspenseful narrative memoir will linger long after the immediate tension of the novel has been resolved.



Quick Details

Seeking Forgiveness

**Book Title**

Seeking Forgiveness

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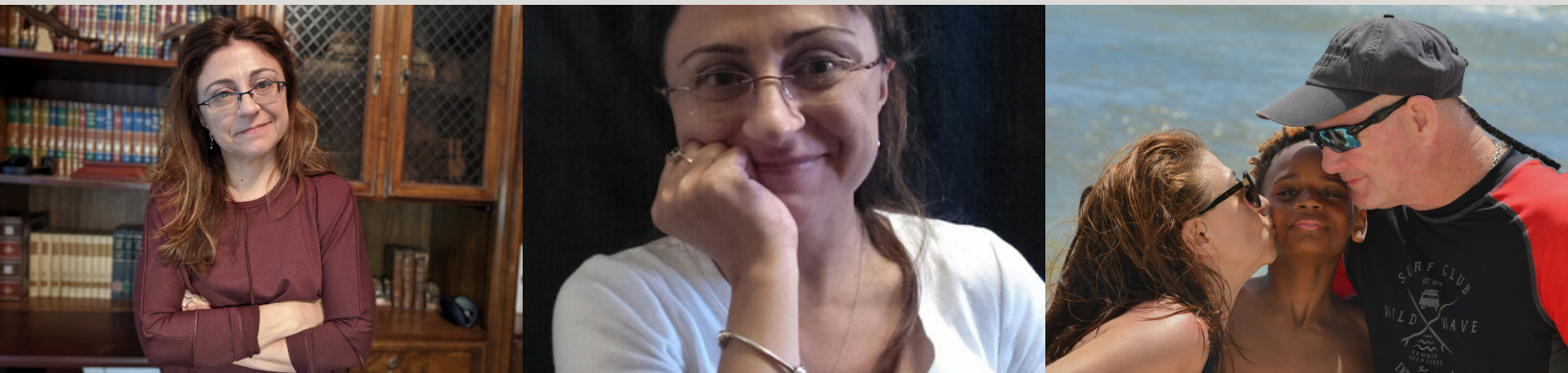
Hardcover, Paperback & Ebook

Previous Published Novel

The Other Shakespeare

Early Press

for Seeking Forgiveness



[The Challenge of Interracial Adoption: 'Is he with you?'](#)

[St. Louis Professor's Novel Inspired by Real-Life Adoption Story](#)

[Professor Shares Experience with Interracial Adoption in Project with Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson](#)

[Exclusive Interview with Author Lea Rachel](#)

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[Episode 250: Lea Rachel - Author of "Seeking Forgiveness"](#)

[Interracial Adoption - One Woman's Astonishing Journey](#)

Interview Questions

Highly Anticipated Questions

Is Seeking Forgiveness your first book?

No. My first published book is *The Other Shakespeare*, a historical fiction novel that imagines the life of William Shakespeare, had he been born a woman.

It's a mixture of fact and fiction, how would you describe your new book?

Seeking Forgiveness is a semi-autobiographical narrative memoir. Quite a number of the episodes and vignettes described in the novel happened in my own life, as a white mother raising a Black son in America today. But there are fictional elements embedded throughout the story in order to protect the privacy of my adopted son.

What do you hope readers will take away from your book?

While a growing trend, interracial adoption is still relatively unique in the world today. As such, I get many, many questions about it, from friends, strangers, even other family members. I hope readers of this book leave with a better understanding of what it is like to raise an interracial family in our current environment - the joy of it, but also the difficulties and discrimination that can come with it. I hope my readers finish the book with an enhanced perspective on this one aspect of race in America today.

Why did you choose that title?

I have come to believe that the hardest part of motherhood is never knowing if you are doing it right or not. There is no answer key or definitive guidebook where you can turn to a specific page and look up when a child should receive their first phone, how they should be punished when they steal a pack of gum, or what response to give when they tell you they hate their life. I was aware from the very beginning of my motherhood journey that interracial adoption would be uniquely complex, that it would add additional questions, trials, and tribulations to the experience beyond traditional motherhood. The title reflects the doubt and worry that many mothers feel as they navigate the journey of motherhood, doing the very best that they can, but having no idea if it is good enough.

About the Book

Seeking Forgiveness

An Excerpt - Chapter 1

I want him to know how sorry I am. I want to beg his forgiveness. For all I didn't understand, for all I never knew, for all I still have to learn. But the police have him and I can't reach him. My baby. My child. My son. Why am I hesitating to say it? To use the most obvious description? Because I generally gloss it over, try to act like it doesn't matter - why make everyone uncomfortable and bring it up? But it does matter. It is important. So here it is: My beautiful *Black* boy.

I married late. Thirty-four already when I met the man who appreciated my over-salted popcorn, my distracted housekeeping, my early 5:00 a.m. runs. I bumped into him in a bar, during happy hour, with half priced drinks and greasy appetizers that left misshaped oil puddles behind on the plate. He'd smiled, brushed off the long island iced tea I'd left behind on his shirt, as if liquid could simply be wiped off of linen. I'd smiled back, and within half an hour he'd rescued me from the all-male table of colleagues I'd been straining to have a conversation with.

I work at a bank and my co-workers are mostly puffy white men who shift their feet uncomfortably when I bring up stories about my son, Miles. Like the time Miles asked me why none of the comic books he brought home from the library had Black superheroes in them. Miles was only six years old at the time and Black Panther hadn't yet made it to the movie screen. When my son mentioned the concept of a Black superhero, I'd literally been struck dumb by the notion. I'd stood in the middle of the kitchen with my hand on the refrigerator door and my mind spinning, trying to both picture the novel idea of a Black superhero for the first time, while also deriving a reasonable explanation for why my son hadn't yet seen one. The story as I told it to my colleagues was meant to be funny. I had meant it as, *Can you believe it? Had you even noticed that before? Who knew, but there are like no popular Black superheroes. I mean, in some books Hawkman is sketched a little darkly, but you can only pretend he's Black if you look at the pictures sideways. How dumb am I not to have noticed this before?* I had meant it as a revelation, like Wow! And wouldn't they share in the curiosity of my new discovery. But instead, most of my co-workers turned away at my stories, changed the subject, or most remarkably of all, got angry with me for bringing up irrelevant parenting stories.

The past sixteen years had been a lifetime of revelations about a world I hadn't known existed. And now it had culminated in this. My Black son, behind bars, alone, likely scared, possibly hurt, while I had to wait, impatient, angry, desperate, wishing I could make it all better, but not, at the moment, being enough for him. Had I ever been enough for him?

I remember when I first researched adoption, thirty-five years old at that point and steeped in the knowledge that my eggs were antiquated and mostly dried up, like mini lima beans baked in the sun. I came across an article by a Black woman that told white women to stay away. *Black Children Need Black Mothers*, it was titled, and the essence of the argument was that white women should not even consider adopting Black children; that inter-racial adoption was, frankly, dangerous. At the time I was so stunned by the idea that someone would be against my adopting a child – a Black for, for that matter, the child most likely to be left behind, looked over, passed by, left in the system until he'd aged out – that I thought I must be reading the article incorrectly. I must have missed something, an "and" or a "but" or some other qualifying contraction somewhere. I had to read the article two more times before I understood what the author was trying to say. White women simply don't have what it takes to raise a Black child in America.

I had assumed up until that point that adopting a marginalized child, saving a life from the system, giving a kid a home and a chance, was a good thing. Admittedly, it made me uncomfortable when friends I'd mention the idea to reacted as if adopting a Black child was profound and extraordinary (didn't people adopt babies all the time?), but at the same time, I never stopped them, never refused any accolades, never explored why it might be making me edgy to be praised for adopting a child. I had basked in the flattery of my mostly white friends, and entirely white family, as if my husband and I really were good people, about to do a great thing.

But then here was this Black woman, salt and pepper hair, large hoop earrings, earnest facial expression staring out at me from the computer screen, telling me to stay away from her kind. Informing me that, by definition, I would be a terrible mother for a Black child. My blood pressure ticked up as I reread the article and I thought, this woman doesn't even know me! If she only knew me, she'd see that my heart was in the right place. She'd understand that I mostly tried to do good.

But after the third reading I felt deflated, in large part because it offered no hope. The article implied that there was nothing my husband nor I could do to remedy the situation. We couldn't work to change the circumstances. We couldn't not be white. We could only stay away.

Up until that point I'd always prided myself on my work ethic. I was an A-type personality, determined, driven, resolute in my goals. I ran three miles a day, whether I was tired or not, I worked long hours at the bank until my evaluations rained down praise, I was even right this minute researching adoption like a conscientious person, trying to make a major life decision in an informed and thoughtful manner. Yet this very research was telling me that I was an inherently wrong person and that there was no way I could ever be right.

I realized later that it was the kind of message Black people had been hearing for years.

At the time, though, my reaction was to call an old high school friend from Detroit.

"Hey girlfriend," Tiffany purred, seeming happy to hear from me. Tiffany had been my best friend throughout my teenage years, and we'd spent countless hours on the phone in high school reassuring each other, supporting each other, trying to make sense of the world together. The sound of her voice was the sound of my past and her easy enthusiasm brightened my spirits. I asked Tiffany how her family was doing.

"They good, they good, you know, getting bigger all the time, especially Cedric." I laughed, recalling her husband Cedric's increasing waistline. We were all getting bigger, older, more seasoned.

It took me a minute, but I eventually brought the conversation around to the purpose of my call. "Nate and I have decided to, well, adopt. Through the foster system." There. I'd said it. I'd spit it out. In the moment of silence that landed between us my hands prickled with sweat. I imagined Tiffany responding, *Umm, why? Whatever gave you the idea that you could do that?*

But instead she squealed approval. "I'd stopped asking," she added, "because you got angry at me the last time I brought kids up. Even though, well, you aren't getting any younger." It was true, it'd been a rather long time since Tiffany and I had last spoken, and it was because I'd gotten sick of her always asking if I was going to have kids already. Just because so many of our friends had them, did that mean Nate and I had to too? Was it some kind of social obligation? What if I just didn't want to (though of course, I did)? I found out later that Tiffany kept bringing it up because she'd just wanted us to have kids around the same time, so our children could be friends. She hadn't been trying to pressure me, so much as share something with me.

"I know," I sighed. "I'm sorry. Well, we are looking into adoption now."

"That's great," she said supportively, giving me the space to go on.

"There's a lot of paperwork involved, it's crazy. You have to check what you're comfortable with, what you think you can and can't handle. The checklist is two pages long. Developmental problems, yes or no? Autism, yes or no? Drug exposure, yes or no? African American, yes or no?" Hearing myself say it out loud, I realized only then that 'African American' came in a list of options that were mostly negative.

"You can handle anything," Tiffany said, without hesitation. "You'll be a great mother, I know it. Just do it. And if it's a girl, remember to name her after me."

I smiled, recalling the time Tiffany had saved my life by pushing me out of the way of an oncoming school bus. She'd always been more aware of the world than I was; too often I stood oblivious, lost in thought. That belching yellow school bus had given me such a scare, however, that I'd promised to name my first child after her, something she'd never since let me forget.

"Thanks," I replied earnestly, "and you know it." And with that affirmation, I chose to assume that my closest Black friend had just told me it was ok to adopt a Black baby. I decided to move forward, and disregard the salt and pepper lady with the extra large hoop earrings.

Looking around the waiting room at the police station sixteen years later, however, echoes of that long-ago article suddenly came back to me. A white mother will fail to teach a Black child his culture, it said. She will not understand his experience in the world, and he will grow up isolated, confused, and ill-prepared to protect himself in an America that will judge him harshly and do it's best to keep him down. A white mother *can not understand* what it means to be Black in this country, and so it is *dangerous* for a white woman to raise a Black child. It is unconscionable for her to even try.

Staring at the gray tile floor beneath my feet, at the brown cement walls of the unforgiving police station, I finally had to admit that the author ha a point. I never should have adopted my son. I was not a good mother after all. I had indeed failed to protect my baby from this not unpredictable fate. He never should have been given to me in the first place.