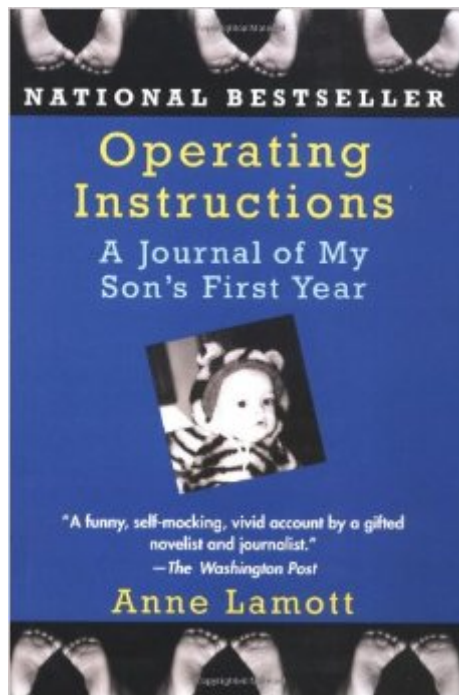


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# Operating Instructions: A Journal Of My Son's First Year (Ballantine Reader's Circle)



## Synopsis

It seems no mother of a newborn has ever been more hilarious, more honest, or more touching than Ann Lamott is in *OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS*. A single parent whose baby's father is out of the picture, Lamott struggles not only to support her little family by her wits and her writing, but to stay sober at the same time. Faith in God helps; so does her loyal band of helpers, from her childless best friend Pammy to her mother and "Aunt Dudu" to the folks at the La Leche League hotline. And between colic, wheat-free diets, and the triumph of solid food, Lamott learns that blessings and losses come together, and that as our capacity for joy increases, so does our capacity for grief. "An enormous triumph . . . Charming . . . Powerful . . . A gracious book, with dozens of lovingly drawn characters and a deep, infectious religiosity throughout. It is also funny." -- San Francisco Chronicle "Smart, funny and comforting . . . Lamott has a conversational style that perfectly conveys her friendly, self-deprecating humor." -- Los Angeles Times Book Review

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is a pleasure to read. Fast, nervous, searching--it's a great reassurance to any woman experiencing the very real demands of pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering. Lamott is a self-confessed non-superwoman--preoccupied with Sam in the early months of his life, it is as much as she can do to brush her teeth, let alone get out of bed. Writing, her life's work? She obviously misses it, but for a few difficult months, even as she is sole-breadwinner for her little family--she just

can't get up the energy to do it. The reader knows that she finished this book, that she kept on writing--but the reader also understands that for a certain time period Lamott was paralyzed by her new experience. The book is very obviously adapted from a real journal--prior to Sam's birth, she worries about the fact that he is male. She worries about his alien genitals, and goes for circumcision because it's obviously what she likes in a man, as much as it is for any health reasons. These worries fade once Sam is born, replaced by the reality of colic, poop, and struggle for a balance between "Sam-time" and "Mom-time." It shows Lamott's talent as a writer that this sequential experience of changes in her baby's life comes as a strength, not a weakness.

Anne Lamott's "Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year" is one of the most honest--painfully so--books I've ever read on both pregnancy and new motherhood. Given the strictures of Lamott's situation at the time--no man around to help her or take responsibility for his child--the humor in this book is nothing short of amazing. After a particularly frustrating episode of feeding solids to her son Sam, Lamott writes that the process is a lot like spackling; you fill the hole with stuff, scrape around the sides, try to pack some more stuff in the hole, and so on. This was so true and so perfectly described that I laughed out loud with recognition. Although Lamott's situation isn't everyone's, the difficulties, fears and joys she describes herein are universal to most new parents. This makes a marvelous gift for the new mom who has everything else and who could use a good laugh.

When I gave birth to a son in 1997 I, quite honestly, didn't know what hit me. I felt joy and wonder but I wasn't "blissed out" the way the people around me expected me to be. I was too frightened by my changing life to be able to live in the moment, laugh at the mishaps, and enjoy the "new guy." The "life-line" I found was literally this book. I read it over and over, as if it was some tonic that assuaged my fears about "doing everything right" and being a perfect mother. I can't tell you the number of times I quoted Lamott's writings to others. She helped me get through a difficult period and adjust. This book changed me. Read it. Lamott is a gifted writer who tells it like it (REALLY) is.

I read this book in 40-minute intervals while my son was nursing...and what a perfect way it was to spend those long, sleepless nights! Sometimes I was blind with baby-worship and othertimes I was glad to read how Anne restrained herself from leaving her baby on the front porch to test out Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest. She describes everything in such a fresh and funny way and made me appreciate things that had passed unnoticed -- like the "scritch scritch scritch" that

their tiny fingers make--it never occurred to me that it "sounds like someone who has been buried alive and is scratching the top of a coffin"...however once I read that, sure enough--that's what it sounds like! (My son continues to make that sound to this day...probably because he knows how much it creeps me out now) I just love how manic her maternal feelings are--from hope, buoyancy and joy to hate, fear and loathing all within the same 5 minutes. It certainly is therapy to be able to read another mom's journal and breathe a sigh of relief (and recognition) and say...oh good, this crazy mood will end. I really enjoyed her company those first few months after our baby was born. I can understand though, how some of the more perfect women in the world might have trouble appreciating her. She's very human.

With unflinching honesty Anne LaMott loosely recounts the first year of her son's life. As a recovering alcoholic and single Mother, she vacillates between hair pulling frustration and utter awe as her son changes month by month, sometimes day by day. Surrounded by an incredible support staff of friends and family, and an unwavering faith in God she navigates the path of parenthood and life with a wicked sense of humor that leaves you laughing out loud one minute and then pricking your heart with moving eloquence.

I'm a Californian, I'm a writer (*Baby Catcher*, Scribner 2002), I'm a mother and midwife, and I'm a dyed-in-the-wool Anne Lamott fan - and *Operating Instructions* is one of Annie's very, very best. With wit, humor, and brutal honesty, she chronicles the pregnancy, birth, and 1st year of her son Sam's life. At the same time, she shares the illness, decline and death of her best friend, Pammy. Written with her usual inimitable and quirky take on Life and populated by her usual quirky cast of characters, *Operating Instructions* will stand the test of time.

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