



# I'm Down: A Memoir

By Mishna Wolff

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Mishna Wolff grew up in a poor black neighborhood with her single father, a white man who truly believed he was black. "He strutted around with a short perm, a Cosby-esqe sweater, gold chains and a Kangol?telling jokes like Redd Fox, and giving advice like Jesse Jackson. You couldn't tell my father he was white. Believe me, I tried," writes Wolff. And so from early childhood on, her father began his crusade to make his white daughter *down*.

Unfortunately, Mishna didn't quite fit in with the neighborhood kids: she couldn't dance, she couldn't sing, she couldn't double Dutch and she was the worst player on her all-black basketball team. She was shy, uncool, and painfully white. And yet when she was suddenly sent to a rich white school, she found she was too "black" to fit in with her white classmates.

*I'm Down* is a hip, hysterical and at the same time beautiful memoir that will have you howling with laughter, recommending it to friends and questioning what it means to be black and white in America.

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## **I'm Down: A Memoir** By Mishna Wolff Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #49472 in Books
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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Humorist and former model Wolff details her childhood growing up in an all-black Seattle neighborhood with a white father who wanted to be black in this amusing memoir. Wolff never quite fit in with the neighborhood kids, despite her father's urgings that she make friends with the sisters on the block. Her father was raised in a similar neighborhood and—after a brief stint as a hippie in Vermont—returned to Seattle and settled into life as a self-proclaimed black man. Wolff and her younger, more outgoing sister, Anora, are taught to embrace all things black, just like their father and his string of black girlfriends. Just as Wolff finds her footing in the local elementary school (after having mastered the art of capping: think yo mama jokes), her mother, recently divorced from her father and living as a Buddhist, decides to enroll Wolff in the Individual Progress Program, a school for gifted children. Once again, Wolff finds herself the outcast among the wealthy white kids who own horses and take lavish vacations. While Wolff is adept at balancing humorous memories with more poignant moments of a daughter trying to earn her father's admiration, the result is more a series of vignettes than a cohesive memoir. (*June*)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

In this coming-of-age memoir, Wolff tackles an uncomfortable, even taboo subject: racial tension and a young white girl's attempt to assimilate into black culture. Most critics were greatly affected by Wolff's experiences -- many times hilarious and educational, but often quite sad. Wolff nonetheless maintains a light tone throughout as she details her childhood in rich dialogue and detail. A few reviewers commented that parts of her life read like a sitcom, albeit with little drama (or even trauma, the stuff of memoirs). Only the *Washington Post* diverged from other critics in its assessment that Wolff failed to explain her father's own interesting immersion in black culture. Most readers, however, will embrace both Wolff's and her father's stories.

## Review

"This buoyant memoir is rich in detail but never feels over embellished...*I'm Down* certainly has serious thoughts on its mind (Wolff actually grew up quite poor and hungry), but the tone manages to be light and triumphant because of the hilarious child-goggles Wolff wears while spinning her tales. Rating: A"

?*Entertainment Weekly*

"An authentically funny, truly transcendent work that makes other, sorry-voiced memoirs by a certain more privileged class of writer pale--pun intended--by comparison...Wolff's focus, and the sweet soul of this terrific book, was on being accepted by her streetwise, wiseass dad, whom she knew loved her--and whom she loved--unequivocally." ?*Elle Magazine*

"As she tells you at the outset of *I'm Down*, Mishna Wolff is all white?nothing remarkable, except that her way cool father, "Wolfy," thinks he's black (he's not). What follows is a funny-melancholy coming of age memoir [in which] Mishna searches for identity in her broken home, her snobby, mostly white prep school, and?most restrictive of all?her longing heart." ?*O Magazine*

"Deftly and hilariously delineates the American drama of race and class for one little girl." ?*Kirkus Reviews*

"Mishna Wolff was a white girl who grew up in a poor black neighborhood. This funny, engaging, and perceptive memoir tells the story of how she managed to negotiate these two very different worlds, and

emerge with her sanity--and identity--intact.” ?Tom Perrotta, author of *Little Children* and *The Abstinence Teacher*

“And you thought you had a hard time fitting in when you were growing up? Try on Mishna Wolff's bizarre childhood for size...*I'm Down* explodes racial and cultural stereotypes with self-deprecating wit, wry humor and keen observation.” ?*Janelle Brown, author of All We Ever Wanted Was Everything*

“In a parallel universe - one, say, where Richard Pryor could be merged with Mark Twain and re- born with two x-chromosomes - the result would probably be Mishna Wolff. And her memoir, I have no doubt, would be as beautiful, funny, touching and irresistible as *I'm Down*. ” ?*Jerry Stahl, author of Permanent Midnight and Pain Killers*.

“Hilarious and sometimes tragic, Mishna Wolff's book is the expertly woven tale of a girl caught between two lives, two races, and two classes.” ?*Christian Lander, author of Stuff White People Like*

“A really, really funny book about the slings and arrows of growing up, of being a kid, of figuring out where you belong, of figuring IT out. The royal IT. Mishna's writing is fast, hip, edgy and so funny.” ?*Michael Showalter, comedian and actor (The State and Wet Hot American Summer)*

“Hilarious, bittersweet, and full of soul (in every sense of the word).” ?*Wendy McClure, author of I'm Not The New Me*

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#### **Graham Ayala:**

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