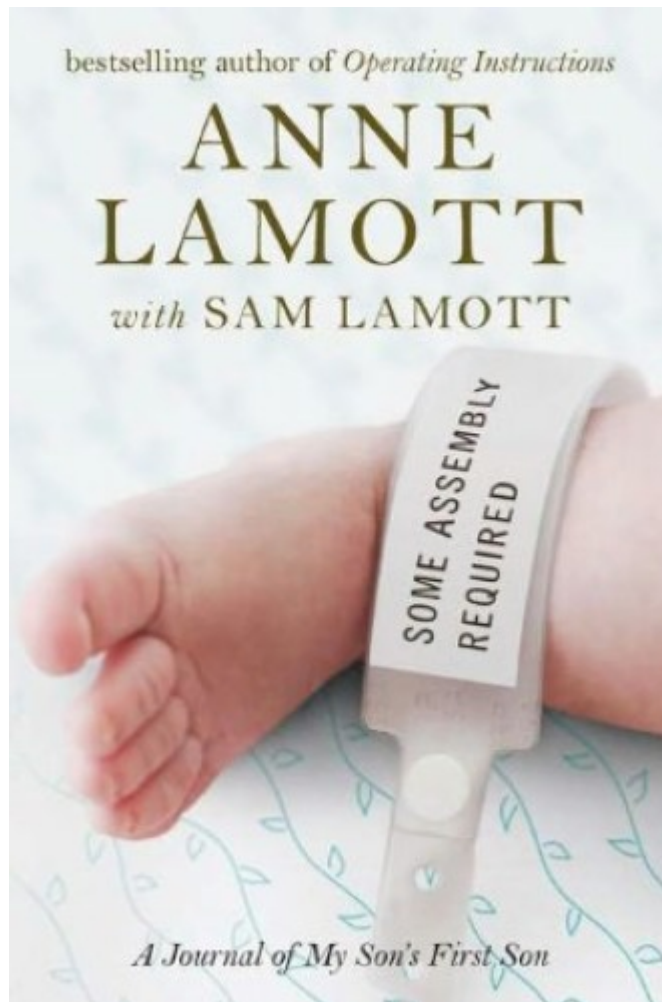


Some Assembly Required, by Anne Lamott with Sam Lamott

reviewed by [Cindy Crosby](#) in the [August 22, 2012](#) issue

In Review



Some Assembly Required

By Anne Lamott with Sam Lamott
Riverhead

Anne Lamott fans: if you're expecting a reprise of the gritty *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*, this isn't it. But read on. There's plenty in *Some Assembly Required* to appreciate. Lamott's ongoing story is also a reminder that if

you are in a hard place, community is what might save you—sometimes from yourself.

The premise of the book is simple. When your only child unexpectedly becomes a father, how do you let him build a life as an adult without trying to control everything? Lamott is about to find out. Anne's son, Sam, is 19 years old and his girlfriend, Amy, is 20 when their son, Jax, is born. As Lamott says, "They're both a little young, but who asked me?"

Lamott, 55, who has chronicled her faith journey in *Traveling Mercies* and *Grace (Eventually)*, finds that being a grandmother is a date with her own mortality. After Jax is born she reflects, "It's unimaginable that we were all so perfect and lovely once, as opposed to our current conditions—awful, slightly scaly, plumping up, and in decay." It is also a time to reassess her need to control and to be the center of the universe and to learn to manage her anxiety.

One of the best things about reading Lamott's books is her unique voice, by turns wise, funny, whiney and self-deprecating. Her attempts to let Amy and Sam make their own mistakes with Jax and in their relationship result in some humorous moments. At one point, Lamott notes that she has been observing "mitts off the kids day," not calling either of them to "nudge, pry, or prey." Another time she muses, "It's funny how no one seems to want my always excellent advice."

Some Assembly Required might very well refer to what is demanded of the reader. Although the book is organized chronologically as a journal, it has the feel of a refrigerator plastered with wisdom quote magnets, grocery lists, postcards and snapshots, all thrown together. Journal entries recount her mishmash of experiences with organized religion as she bounces between services at her home church (St. Andrew Presbyterian), a nearby ashram, a Fijian church and a Catholic church. Phone conversations with friends, interviews with and e-mails from Sam and Amy and talks with mentors over lunch are patched into the book. There are also entries about Lamott's trip to India and a tour of Europe, both of which seem like distractions.

The best parts of *Some Assembly Required* focus on Lamott's internal struggles and her willingness to share them, as well as on her efforts to articulate her overwhelming love for Jax and the fear that Amy will move far away. When Sam calls Anne to tell her he and Amy have been fighting—and Amy is leaving—Lamott's

coping mechanisms are humorous, yet touching.

“Even though I have acid and sewage and grippage in my stomach, which I have had many times before and will have many times again, I can build faith muscles by bearing my feelings of misery and powerlessness—a kind of Nautilus,” she writes. “Rumi said that through love, all pain would turn to medicine. But he never met my family. Or me.”

One of her coping mechanisms is her “god box.” At one point, Lamott recounts how she wrote Amy’s name on a piece of paper and dropped it into the box: “‘Here,’ I said to Jesus, with enormous hostility, ‘have a go at it,’ and closed the lid.”

The numerous times Lamott relies on her friends for perspective, comfort and a listening ear remind us of the strength that can be found in community, whether a community of friends, family or faith. Lamott exemplifies this when she phones her friend Neshama and dumps her anxieties on her. Neshama prompts her to remember the things that will bring her comfort: “dogs, breath, prayer, phone, crying, god box, aspirin, and chocolate as needed. And call me in the afternoon.”

Dogs, prayer, chocolate—and friends who listen. It’s good advice for those of us who struggle with some of the universal issues that Lamott does and are looking for comfort—and for anyone entering a new season of being a grandparent.