Confessions of a Closet Catholic

Justine Silver’s best friend, Mary Catherine McAllister, has given up chocolate for Lent, but Jussy doesn’t think God wants her to make that kind of sacrifice. So she’s decided to give up being Jewish instead. Jussy’s bedroom closet has become her confessional, where she pours out her sins to her teddy bear and takes Communion using grape juice and matzo. But when her beloved grandmother, Bubbe, suffers a stroke, Jussy worries that her religious exploration is responsible. Worse, Jussy must suddenly contemplate life without Bubbe, the one person who seemed to understand her. Now Jussy feels she must decide once and for all who she is, and where she fits in.

My Personal Review:
Librarians often recommend the classic 1970 Judy Blume novel, Are You There God, It’s Me, Margaret, but fear it is rather outdated. Now we can happily point to a future classic-to-be by offering this smart and endearing book to that same pre-teen crowd. The novel follows 11-year-old Justine Silver (Jussy), who, although Jewish, is struggling with her religious identity while simultaneously dealing with moving away from her beloved Bubbe, being a tormented middle child, and having a crush on her best friends brother. The little she knows about the Catholic religion attracts her, and she hilariously tries to create a secret confessional in her bedroom closet (confessing to her stuffed teddy bear), thinking that confession every week is a lot better than saving it all up for one day. Its impossible to remember a whole years worth of sins, especially when you have a family as annoying as mine and are constantly being provoked to do bad things. Of course, the bad things she does are hardly bad at all, but every young person will identify with her daily struggles with school, odd family members, and a weakness for chocolate. The exploration of Judaism as opposed to other religions is a new theme for pre-teen fiction, and this book is an excellent one to put into the hands of any curious young person. Secular Jewish kids will see themselves in Jussys struggles and in her eventual conclusions about the worth of belonging to the religion of her grandparents. This novel is a fresh and delightful mix of the humorous,
realistic world of a family of twice-a-year Jews, starring a questioning heroine with strong values and a decidedly compassionate heart. Highly recommended for ages 10-12.
Reviewed by Lisa Silverman

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