

Title: *A River Could Be A Tree*

Author: *Angela Himsel and Shulem Deen*

Genre: *Autobiography*

Subject: *Adult transformation*

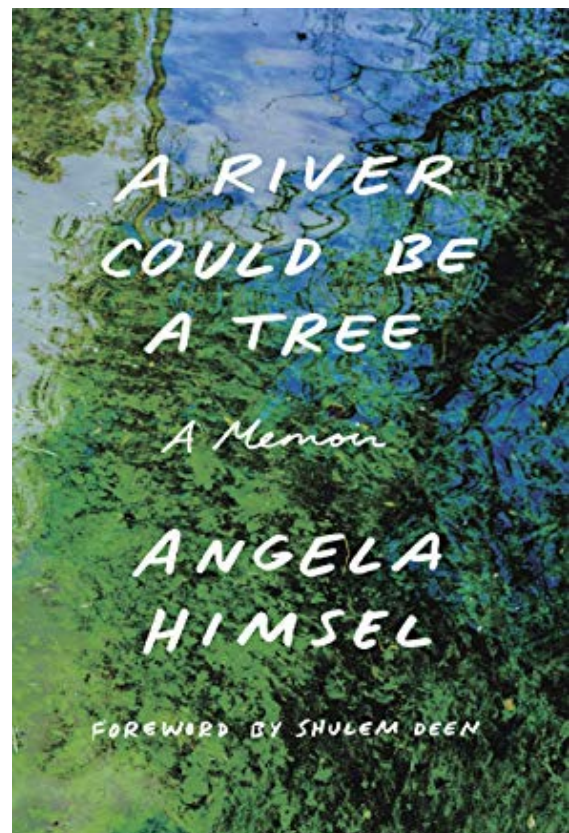
Hook: *Most unlikely person to convert to Judaism*

Reviewer's opinion: *Understated emotional expression seems to be consistent with her stoic German roots*

Personal recommendation? *Quiet humor and warmth ... and it was a most interesting read.*

Reviewed by **Paula Sabin**
TBI member for 18 years

This was a most interesting memoir about the most unlikely person I've ever read about, heard of or encountered to ever convert to Judaism. Her grandparents were immigrants from Germany and she grew up in a German American family in an isolated farm community in Indiana. Her family belonged to this strange **Christian cult that emphasized the "Old Testament" as well as the New one**, which means they celebrated the Jewish Holidays mentioned in the Bible, but nothing like Jews celebrate it, because none of them remotely knew a Jew. The author and her siblings seemed to me to be the epitome of "goyishness" in the way they



talked and thought about things. They believed that the apocalypse would happen any day, thought of how things would be in the wonderful afterlife and didn't believe in going to doctors. Like Christian Scientists, they believed that God would heal everything. Also, they were culturally like one would expect a **farm family from Indiana** to be, which is quite different from how most Jews in this country are.

However, the author was quite intelligent, did well in school, and although college wasn't within her frame of reference, a teacher encouraged her to apply to college and she eventually went to Indiana University. When she is considering her Junior year abroad, she initially thought she would go to Germany, where she still had relatives, but when she saw a brochure of Israel, her biblical imagination took hold and she decided to go there. Her naïveté was such that she thought Israel was frozen in time, that it was just like biblical days with desert everywhere and people getting around on camels! **When she goes to Israel, that is when her transformation begins.**

My one criticism of the book is that the novelist's emotional expression is quite understated, even when a terrible tragedy happens. But then, this understated emotional expression seems to be consistent with her stoic German roots.

There is quiet humor and warmth in this book, however and it was a most interesting read.