

## The Mayor Of Splitsville

A memoir in which a combative divorce lawyer pleads his own case.

Edward Kosner  
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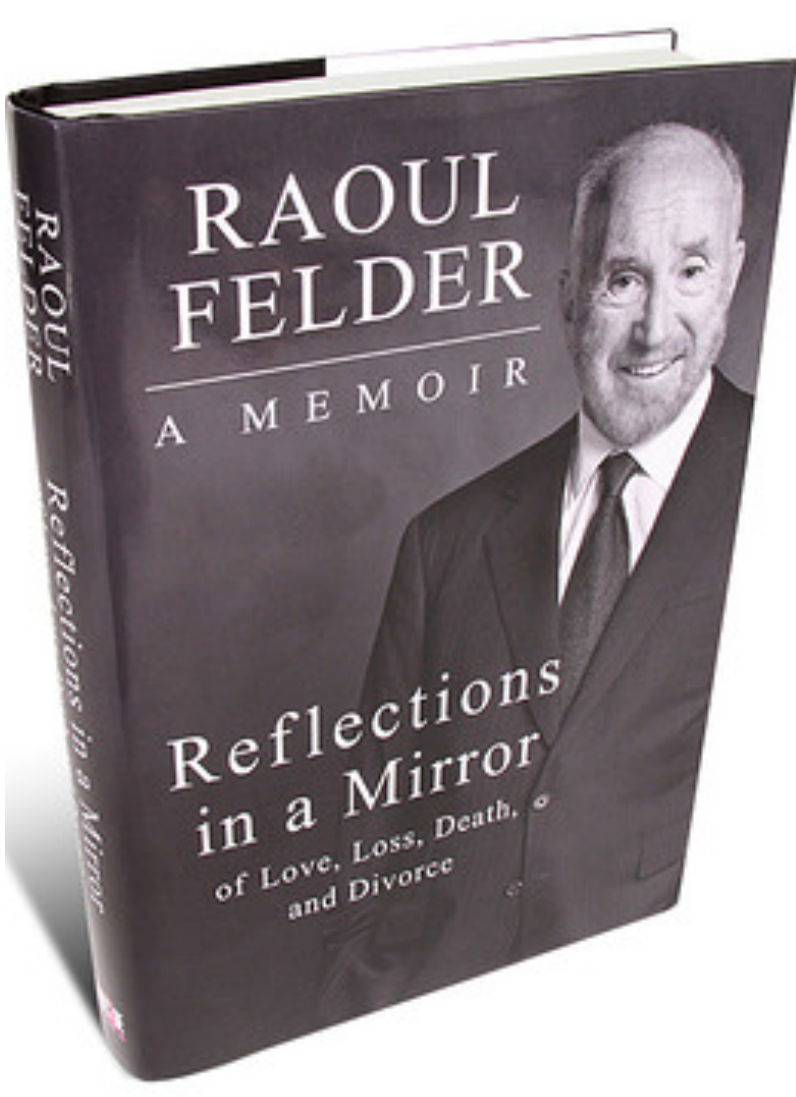
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Raoul Felder is a *macher*—a brash operator, the model for the feral New York divorce lawyers called “bombers.” A Brooklyn boy, he is the baby brother of the legendary songwriter Doc Pomus, the crony of comedian Jackie Mason, and a quote machine whose number was in every tabloid reporter’s Rolodex back when reporters had Rolodexes.

His new book, “Reflections in a Mirror,” comes with a sly disclaimer tucked into a paragraph on page 10: “Memory or lack of memory caused me to invent some of [the story] or forced me to lie about the rest.” But that hasn’t kept him from delivering an entertaining if ramshackle memoir full of moving vignettes of family anguish and youthful striving, plus celebrity tattle about his roster of clients and their bizarre marital messes.

Like any master litigator, Mr. Felder has a fondness for the sound of his own voice. Compelling chapters of his book are interrupted by grandiloquent riffs and inane shaggy-dog stories about sharing an elevator with Yankee slugger Reggie Jackson or being ignored at a party by Barbra Streisand and the Broadway producer David Merrick. Mr. Felder is also fond of factoids. Did you know that \$1 million in \$100 bills weighs 22 pounds? I do now.

The memoir is actually an uneasy marriage of two books. One is an eloquent reimagining of a Williamsburg boy’s life. Born into a barely middle-class family in 1939, young Felder feared that he was doomed to be a nonentity like his father, a nondescript lawyer and hanger-on at the clubhouses of the local Democratic machine. But after an adventurous, comical detour to a Swiss medical school, he found his way to New York University Law School and soon re-created himself as a crack assistant U.S. attorney ultimately bound for fame and fortune in divorce court.



### REFLECTIONS IN A MIRROR

By Raoul Felder  
(Barricade, 407 pages, \$24.95)

stand up to cross-examination in memoir court.

Still, Mr. Felder knows how to tell a story. His account of a World War II visit to his brother’s brace repairman in Manhattan’s heavily German Yorkville neighborhood is a gem. “Never mentioned,” he writes, “were the unspeakable atrocities visited” on the Jews “by the Yorkville residents’ former countrymen of recent vintage.” Later, there is a droll account of the young-doctor-not-to-be’s misadventures in anatomy class in Bern, where he is mischievously assigned to dissect the throat muscles of a cadaver with a mammoth goiter.

The rest of Mr. Felder’s book is a collection of war stories from his divorce practice involving rich, kinda-famous people like Jocelyn Wildenstein—the grotesque cosmetic-surgery addict called “the Bride of Wildenstein”—and her husband, Alec; supermodel Stephanie Seymour and her polo-loving husband, Peter Brant; onetime Miss America Bess Myerson and her crooked lover, the quondam ditch digger Andy Capasso; Picasso’s son Claude; Rudy Giuliani; and former heavyweight champion Riddick Bowe, a gentle giant who went to prison for kidnapping his estranged wife and children.

Counselor Felder portrays himself as an assiduous guardian of his clients’ interests, and he seems to win most of his cases—or at least not wind up with the lesser straw when cases are settled short of trial. Mind-bogglingly complicated as some of these cases can be, Mr. Felder writes: “Divorce lawyers, that breed of man that trembles between humanity and barbarity, like to observe that when the money is worked out, everything else invariably falls into place.”

Nary a harsh word—or truly succulent bit of gossip—about his clients escapes Mr. Felder, but others aren’t so fortunate. He calls former President Jimmy Carter a “crypto anti-Semite” without saying why and sneers that the New York Roman Catholic archdiocese’s lucrative real-estate empire is “built on pederasty.” And he isn’t above using the book to settle scores with judges and lawyers who have crossed him.

Even so, some of his anecdotes would get a yuck out of Jackie Mason. Mr. Felder tells one about a lawyer who sued the maniacal David Merrick, a longtime Felder client.

“Buddy, why did you sue me?” Merrick asked.

“I politely asked when we could expect payment of our bill and . . . you told me to go f—myself,” the lawyer answered.

Replied Merrick: “Is that any reason to sue somebody?”

The reader of a divorce attorney’s saga might reasonably be curious about the lawyer’s own marital arrangements. Mr. Felder chooses to keep to himself until page 381 that he has been married to the same woman for 46 years, and “we have never had an argument.” And, oddly, he never explains how his crippled brother Jerome morphed into Doc Pomus (“This Magic Moment”) of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Still, whatever his flaws as a memoirist, Raoul Felder manages to make a pretty good case for himself.

Mr. Kosner is the author of “It’s News to Me,” a memoir of his career as editor of Newsweek, New York, Esquire and the New York Daily News.

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