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Accidental Sisters: The Story of My 52 Year Wait to Meet My Biological Sibling

Katherine Linn Caire
Books Fluent (Aug 26, 2022)
eBook $7.99 (216pp)
978-1-953865-58-8

Accidental Sisters *is a tender memoir about adoption and about love within families, both biological and not.*

In *Accidental Sisters*, Katherine Linn Caire's uplifting memoir about finding her sister in middle age, coincidence and curiosity fuel a search for a biological family.

Caire was relinquished in a closed infant adoption in 1959. In adulthood, she was struck by the conviction that she needed information about her biological family in order to give her daughters their complete medical history. Thus, she asked the adoption agency to do a social and medical search of her file. Each new piece of information further spurred her curiosity about her past. Then she received a document that contained her birth mother's full name, and she undertook a search for her, a once "indescribable blob out in space."

The book is judicious in pacing out its revelations. Gleaning one piece of information, Caire moves on to wanting another; her upended expectations further fuel her curiosity. Her search is detailed in thrilling terms, as is her exhilaration at meeting her biological sister and first experiencing family mirroring. Interspersed within Caire's story are copies of her birth mother's letters to her social worker, photographs of family members, and her birth mother's diary entries, resulting in added emotional depth. And all of this is set within the context of Caire's warm, supportive relationship with her adoptive parents.

But Caire's search narrative is interrupted toward the end of the book with a shift into a story about giving up a baby for adoption, told from a birth mother's point of view. Its details reflect American culture in the 1950s, but this is nonetheless an interruptive addition. That era's social mores are better addressed in the book's memoir portions, which contain reminders that unmarried pregnant women were often stigmatized and coerced into relinquishing their babies for adoption. Elsewhere, the book also includes moments of proselytizing that dilute the energy of its central story.

Still, the prose is crisp, direct, and embellished by occasional humorous asides. Its conversational addresses to fellow adopted people in search of their own family stories are warm. Caire ably acknowledges that adopted people represent a diverse range of experiences, hopes, and fears. For Caire, each new bit of information compelled her to keep searching, but she holds respect for other approaches, too. Still, her book champions the power of biological connections, which it notes can result in surprising shifts in established beliefs about one's identity.

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MICHELE SHARPE (August 1, 2022)

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