

Incognito: An American Odyssey of Race and Self-Discovery

Michael Sidney Fosberg

Incognito (January 2011)

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"I thought about when I was twelve years old, lying awake at night in the top bunk above my fast-asleep brother, and how I would stare at the ceiling and whisper aloud, I wish I were black... I wish I were black..." writes Michael Fosberg. "Why would I utter those words—a crazy thought for a young white boy—unless deep down I thought I was?" Twenty years later, when Fosberg's mother and adoptive father decided to divorce, the break-up of the only family he'd known triggered a desire to search for the biological father he hadn't seen since he was two years old. Locating him was surprisingly easy, but the information shared in that first phone call was shocking: his father was black, a fact his white mother had never told him.

There is a long history of light-skinned African Americans "passing" for white, but Fosberg discovered he'd been passing for thirty years without even knowing it. His search for self-identity suddenly became a search for a racial identity as well and he embarked on a cross-country journey to visit relatives from all sides of his family in a quest to learn more about his history and discover what being black meant to him. Though he embraced his ethnicity wholeheartedly, he questioned if the fact that he didn't grow up with the racial overtones that affect most African Americans' social development and opportunities in life made him somehow less black.

The book is a fascinating and multifaceted tale of discovery and developing relationships that will appeal to a wide audience, and would make an excellent book club selection. Fosberg's search for answers to complex questions of family, race, and self-identity first became the foundation for his one-man play, also called *Incognito*, which has won critical acclaim over its ten-year run. While the story of his search for his biological family will interest many in the adoption community, Fosberg's honest portrayal of finding what race means to him opens the door for everyone in our society to examine the same questions for themselves. "After all," he writes, "our identities... are absolutely fundamental to our experience as human beings."

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (March 10, 2011)

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