

Mom Loves You Best: Forgiving and Forging Sibling Relationships

Cathy Jo Cress

Kali Cress Peterson

New Horizon Press (December 2010)

Softcover \$14.95 (219pp)

978-0-88282-321-8

"Mom always liked you best," is a familiar refrain...so much so that comedians often make sibling rivalry a cornerstone of their comedy acts. But, for many of the 85 percent of adult Americans who have at least one brother or sister, there's nothing funny about hard feelings that develop in the early years and continue into adulthood.

New studies show that the relationships between siblings influence our social and emotional development as adults. Negative beliefs that begin during childhood—when we perceive that our parent favors an oldest brother or spoils a younger sister or thinks another brother is smarter—often carry over to the adult years, causing stress at family gatherings and alienation.

Fortunately, many siblings grow up to have close relationships. But, for those who are still angry or constantly irritated with their sibling, the book *Mom Loves You Best: Forgiving and Forging Sibling Relationships* is a guide to help adult siblings examine family notions and rituals that have been divisive and help them forgive past wounds to let them begin better relationships for the present and future.

Authors Cathy Jo Cress and Kali Cress Peterson have mapped out a ten-step plan to forgiveness and atonement, leading to reconnecting with the sibling holding a grudge or the one who makes you seethe. They posit that long-held resentments can change and that siblings can establish new and better relationships. Because siblings are likely to share a relationship for more years than any other family member, Cress and Peterson encourage siblings to work toward healing past conflicts and emotional wounds that were never resolved. The chapters are laced with real-life examples of sibling problems and ideas for finally putting those problems to rest.

While *Mom Loves You Best* is primarily directed toward adult siblings, the last chapter, "Twenty Tips for Raising Young Siblings," is about raising happy siblings today. While the authors maintain that adult siblings can reconnect, it is far better to never break apart in the first place. This last chapter should be on every parent's reading list.

Cathy Jo Cress holds a Master's degree in aging and social work from UC Berkeley and is a nationally respected expert on family relationships and sibling rivalry. Co-author Kali Cress Peterson is Cress's daughter. She has a double master's degree in gerontology and public administration from the University of Southern California and is a program director for the SCAN Foundation.

PENNY HASTINGS (January 10, 2011)

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