

To the Moon and Back: A Childhood Under the Influence

Lisa Kohn

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Lisa Kohn's memoir of growing up in the 1960s and 1970s under the influence of the Unification Church—the “Moonies” cult—is at once heartrending and mind-blowing.

Kohn's upbringing was turbulent. She lived in two worlds: on weekends, she and her brother visited their mother, who abandoned them for the Moonies; during the week they stayed with their father, a bartender who considered “slut” a term of endearment and encouraged the use of recreational drugs. She struggled to find a place in the Moonies, always wondering where she truly belonged.

Kohn straightforwardly recalls her feelings of abandonment because her mother chose the church, church duties, and even taking care of other people's children before her own children. She recalls begging her mother to spend time with her, and sitting outside of her mother's door, waiting to be acknowledged. In some ways, Kohn immersed herself in the Moonies out of a deep-seated desire to be with her mother.

At various points in her life, Kohn truly believed that Sun Myung Moon was the “True Parent” of humanity; she was fully immersed, attending a continual stream of workshops and lectures, and reciting “The Pledge” weekly to reaffirm her commitment. She attended her mother's Blessing, a large-scale wedding ceremony with couples whose marriages were arranged by the leader. She looked forward to the day when she, too, would experience the elation of being Blessed.

Within the cult, Kohn was taught that even kissing a boy went against church values; when she experienced normal desire, she became despondent. For years, she agonized over such contradictions. Disastrous consequences, including drug abuse and anorexia, plagued her for years. From this erratic past she learned harsh life lessons, was forced toward independence, and ultimately achieved peace.

Kohn's journey is as riveting as it is shocking. *To the Moon and Back* is an unflinchingly candid and revelatory book.

HILARY DANINHIRSCH (September/October 2018)

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