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Identical Strangers: A Memoir Of Twins Separated And Reunited



Synopsis

Elyse Schein had always known she was adopted, but it wasn't until her mid-thirties while living in Paris that she searched for her biological mother. When Elyse contacted her adoption agency, she was not prepared for the shocking, life-changing news she received: She had an identical twin sister. Elyse was then hit with another bombshell: she and her sister had been separated as infants, and for a time, had been part of a secret study on separated twins. Paula Bernstein, a married writer and mother living in New York, also knew she was adopted, but had no inclination to find her birth mother. When she answered a call from the adoption agency one spring afternoon, Paula's life suddenly divided into two starkly different periods: the time before and the time after she learned the truth. As they reunite and take their tentative first steps from strangers to sisters, Paula and Elyse are also left with haunting questions surrounding their origins and their separation. They learn that the study was conducted by a pair of influential psychiatrists associated with a prestigious adoption agency. As they investigate their birth mother's past, Paula and Elyse move closer toward solving the puzzle of their lives. In alternating voices, Paula and Elyse write with emotional honesty about the immediate intimacy they share as twins and the wide chasm that divides them as two complete strangers. Interweaving eye-opening studies and statistics on twin science into their narrative, they offer an intelligent and heartfelt glimpse into human nature. *Identical Strangers* is the amazing story of two women coming to terms with the strange and unbelievable hand fate has dealt them, an account that broadens the definition of family and provides insight into our own DNA and the singularly exceptional imprint it leaves on our lives. Imagine a slightly different version of you walks across the room, looks you in the eye and says "hello" in your voice. You discover that she has the same birthday, the same allergies, the same tics, and the same way of laughing. Looking at this person, you are able to gaze into your own eyes and see yourself from the outside. This identical individual has the exact same DNA as you and is essentially your clone. We don't have to imagine. From *Identical Strangers* "A transfixing memoir."--Publishers Weekly "Poignant."--Reader's Digest "Absorbing."--Wired "Fascinating . . . An intelligent exploration of how identity intersects with bloodlines. A must-read for anybody interested in what it means to be a family."--Bust From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

File Size: 1265 KB

Print Length: 288 pages

Publisher: Random House (October 2, 2007)

Publication Date: October 2, 2007

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B000W914BI

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #27,771 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #9

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Customer Reviews

As part of eighth grade graduation, all the students in my school had to write a speech. The only topic I remember is this: "Does the end justify the means?" As an eighth grader, I had no idea how to approach this subject. As an adult, I do, and I can say unequivocally "No!" Ironically, my school years, beginning in the late 1960's, saw an increase in social experiments performed under lab conditions. These were the years of the Stanford Prison Experiment in which students acted as guards and prisoners and discovered brutality, and the so-called "Hitler" experiment in which participants were encouraged to deliver electric shocks to unseen victims. Social scientists wanted to know what makes us tick? Can we sublimate our morality in the face of pressure? How much pressure? Oh, and another one: Which is more influential in human development--nature or nurture? There's only one way to truly study nature vs. nurture, and that's with identical twins (who share exact DNA) raised separately. The problem...how to find and study such pairs? Enter the Louise Wise adoption agency and the systematic separation of twins into different families. Adoptive families participated in a twin study without knowing their children were twins. Was this a case of unethical social experimentation? You'll need to read *Identical Strangers* to form your own opinion. *Identical Strangers* is the story chronicled by Elyse Schein and Paula Bernstein who learned

as adults that they were twins. As writers and researchers, Schein and Bernstein uncovered the practices of the adoption agency and found other twin sets (and in one case a triplet set) all raised separately and included in the study. The results were fascinating. Twins often married similar spouses, entered similar careers, had similar dogs. *Identical Strangers* is filled with eerie examples. But as Schein and Bernstein exposed time and again, the costs of these separated twin adoptions were too high. The ends--investigating what makes us "us"--did not justify the means, the pain and suffering of many families.

Just what I look for in a memoir - excellent writing, captivating story, authenticity & vulnerability and more. More dual written books disappoint, but not this one. I loved how their separate stories flowed, rather than being redundant or disjointed. Recommended to those who enjoy memoirs and highly recommended to parents of twins or those who are twins themselves.

Really good book. If you've ever sat and pondered the Zen question "Who am I?", this book makes you look a little bit deeper into what makes up the whole concept of having a...self. When a set of identical twins can be apart for 30-some-years and come together having similar career choices, hand gestures, and personalities, you have to re-think what you mean by one's "self". Both women are great writers and the reader gets to see the excellent way they put together their story in a way that allowed each of them to have their own voice. They are direct and honest about the story of their separation and re-uniting, and make us all stop and think about how much of what our lives have become was destined due to biological make up, and how much we (and the environment) really have any hand at all in the outcomes of our lives.

Nowadays, due to a tight schedule, I rarely make it through an entire book! This book had me firmly in its grip from page one. I am so impressed with how honestly these women bare their souls to us, giving us a clear window into their roller coaster emotional journey.

This is a really good book. It is the story of twins separated at birth, who find each other as adults. It is well written, using a rather unusual format of the two authors taking turns, and expressing their individual thoughts. I found it extremely interesting to learn the sisters' similarities and differences. They also discover some circumstances surrounding their adoption and then decide to find their mother. Overall, I really enjoyed this and it was a pretty quick read. I finished the book feeling like I got all the stories and wasn't left wondering where their lives led them, as often happens with such

memoirs. The book was concise and well edited and flowed nicely. I highly recommend it.

Wow!! This was a page-turner for me. The authors tell the story of their lives as identical twins separated at birth and adopted by two different but very similar families. This situation was manipulated by an adoption agency, their resident psychiatrist and a doctor who was studying the effects "nature vs nurture" as they called it. I have a particular interest in the subject matter, being an adoptee of the same generation as the authors, and being adopted through the same now-seemingly-corrupt agency. An eye-opener, for sure!

A true story of twins, separated in infancy and adopted out, it chronicles their reunion, and search for answers about why they were separated and ultimately, finding their biological roots. This is not a feel good story, but it's honest. Both authors are experienced and gifted writers, and have included historical context to the issue of separated twins and nature vs. nurture. I recommend it for their candor in describing their feelings, as well as for the hints and tips about adoptee searches in New York.

What a moving book. So well written that you feel as though you are experiencing everything right along with these sisters. I was so saddened to think about the lives that could have been. Outraged by a system that cared so little for these infants that their own God complex seemed to outweigh any level of compassion for the lives of the adopted as well as their families. What courageous women these sisters are for sharing their truth with the world. Truly a marvelously written book!

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