



*Hard to Place:
One Family's Journey
through Adoption*
(memoir)

by Marion Goldstein

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Notes: Discussion questions in book

Summary

A memoir about a New Jersey family of seven who adopted two “hard to place” brothers and their painful journey to uncover the truth about the boys’ past.

Details (from the book jacket)

Hard to Place is a memoir about a family. Loss is the catalyst that sets all the action of the book in motion-but this is not a book about loss. It is a narrative that weaves together the lives of seven people: five original members of a family and two hard to place adopted children who eventually become part of it.

As the adopted boys move into adulthood, the whole family joins in their quest to uncover and confront painful secrets about the past. After an almost miraculous convergence of events, the family is almost torn apart by what is discovered.

REVIEWS

Adopt Talk April 2009

Hard to Place is not only an adoption story, but also a memoir of a family that reads like a novel. Although the circumstances leading this family to adoption are not typical, after the loss of their fourth child at birth (a biological child), the feelings and experiences will touch anyone who has adopted a child.

As a parent of both a biologic and an adopted child I found myself relating to many of the emotions described in the book. Hard to Place traces the adoption process as well as details the story of the Goldstein family, and their five children. We see strength of the family bond as it deals with Juvenile Diabetes, alcoholism and of course every adoptive parents concern, search and reunion.

The mystery of the two adopted boys beginning is both suspenseful and heartbreaking. The love and support that they are given by their adoptive parents and siblings is so strong it leaves you with an understanding of what "family" really means. I highly recommend Hard to Place. It is a beautifully and sensitively written story of family.

Italian Tribune: Date March 19, 2009

As a rule this newspaper reviews books by Italian authors or about travel to Italy. We have introduced you to some vivid Italian novels and life experiences. This week I will make an exception to my Italian rule

I couldn't put the book down once I started it. The book begins in the late 1960's and details the life of a suburban housewife with three young children (two boys and a girl), and one on the way. It will begin to center on her unborn son that she will name John. It then unfolds into a drama of life, death, depression, alcoholism, illness, accomplishment and business, but most of all about the experience of loving people and adoption.

The reader will travel through one strong and courageous lady's life as she details the adoption of two "hard to place" brothers and their pre-adoption horror story.

I never felt this was only a story about adoption, although it certainly makes you open your mind and heart to the beauty of it. But rather a story of one woman's quest to give her two adopted sons as well as her own biological children, a home of love and care and education as she herself grows in her role as mother and wife. Through it all, she receives her BA degree, a Master's degree, holds her marriage together, and cares for her daughter with Juvenile Diabetes, while always attending to the emotional needs of her precious Kurt and Eddie. Through this she discovers faith, religion and poetry along the way. Then, 25 years later, that day she waited for came – Kurt and Eddie wanted to find their biological parents. The emotion of that journey will keep your attention to the end.

Author Biography

<http://mariongoldstein.com>

Marion Goldstein is a psychotherapist who lives in Montclair, NJ. For eighteen years she was associated with Carrier Foundation, initially as a Poetry Therapist and subsequently as Director of the Women's Program and The Women's Trauma Program.



Articles she has written have appeared in the Carrier Foundation Medical Education Letter, The Journal of Social Psychiatry, The Arts in Psychotherapy and The Journal of Poetry Therapy. She contributed a chapter to Life Guidance through Literature, a text published by the American Library Association. A section of "Hard To Place," chapter 3, entitled "Two Roads Diverged" was previously published in Ars Medica, a Journal of Medicine, the Arts, and Humanities Vol #4, No 1, Fall 2007. A section of chapter 12, entitled "Shattered Glass" is scheduled for publication in the anthology Transform edited by Tim Wenzell. She is an adjunct professor at Caldwell College where she teaches a course in Poetry Therapy.

Her poetry has been published in several literary journals. Her chapbook Blue Prints was edited by Jason Shinder and published by The New School Chapbook series. Her chapbook Psalms for the Cosmos was published by Pudding House Press and most recently several of her poems have appeared in Preaching the Poetry of the Gospels and Science as Sacred Metaphor written by Sr. Elizabeth Michael Boyle and published by The Liturgical Press.

You can contact Marion Goldstein at mgoldstein@mariongoldstein.com

Discussion Questions

1. It is obvious that the title *Hard to Place* is taken from the description of the Spaulding adoption agency as one for “hard to place children .” Does this title reverberate in other ways throughout the book?
2. Discuss how Marion’s experience in the delivery room, when she became aware of losing John, was transformed for her into a “gift of loss.”
3. On page 19, Marion states that as a result of writing the poem about the loss of John, “absence and presence were co –mingled.” Discuss this statement.
4. As a result of their early deprivation, there were risks encountered with the decision to adopt Kurt and Eddie. Does the family’s experience confirm or refute the wisdom of taking these risks?
5. Marion acknowledges that she and Bob lied to the children in order to present the idea of adoption in a favorable light. Why do you feel this was appropriate or inappropriate?
6. There are references in the story to the inability to cry: Marion’s holding back tears from the family after losing John; Kurt and Eddie’s stoic behavior until the breakthrough moment when on page 77, they do cry. Discuss the statement that “...this is the day trust was born.”
7. On page 80, Marion talks about “compassionate action.” How is this concept incorporated into her story of spiritual development?
8. Discuss Marion’s reasoning on page 113, that to end the marriage would have hurt the children more.

9. Discuss the role of music in Kurt and Eddie's life.
10. How was Bob able to help Kurt when he went through his own addiction problems? How was Kurt's development of the disease alike or different from Bob's?
11. How were the five children's relationships to each other demonstrated? How did they support each other?
12. Discuss the strong threads of coincidence throughout the book: (page 138) glass falling out of light fixture; (page 164) the fact that after a quarter of a century, some unseen force had motivated three segments of the family to seek each other out; (page 256) Eddie suddenly pulling his car to the side of the road and the subsequent discovery.
13. In view of recent exposes of orphaned children and children being trafficked, did you believe there was anything to Lucienne's claim to the boy's that they had been kidnapped when they were toddlers?
14. How do Eddie's letters, one to his biological mother on page 184 and the other to Marion on page 229 reflect the personal transitions Eddie underwent as a result of learning the truth about his past?
15. On page 181, Marion, speaking about Lucienne states she wanted "to tear her eyes out." How does Marion ultimately resolve and let go of these negative feelings?
16. Discuss Kurt and Eddie's reaction to meeting long lost relatives versus their reaction to meeting Allen Morton.
17. How does Dennis and Beth's adoption of Annie reinforce the message of the book?

18. One of the questions that memoirs are subject to is whether the truth has been clearly presented or whether embellishments take it beyond non-fiction. How well do you think the author remains authentic?

For Further Reading

Non-Fiction works about Adoption

Adesman, Andrew. Parenting your adopted child: a positive approach to building a strong family

Caughman, Susan. You can adopt: an adoptive families guide

Falker, Elizabeth Swire The ultimate insider's guide to adoption : everything you need to know about domestic and international adoption.

Fessler, Ann. The girls who went away : the hidden history of women who surrendered children for adoption in the decades before Roe v. Wade

Player, Corrie Lynne The everything parent's guide to raising your adopted child : a complete handbook to welcoming your adopted child into your heart and home,

Sachs, Dana. The life we were given : Operation Babylift, international adoption, and the children of war in Vietnam

Sember, Brette McWhorter The adoption answer book

Simon, Scott. Baby, we were meant for each other : in praise of adoption

Novels about Adoption

These are novels in which adoption plays an important part of the plot. These stories are told from varied perspectives. Titles selected by librarians, readers and professional reviewers. These include titles for adults and young adults.

Alberts, Laurie - Lost Daughters

Alexie, Sherman - Indian Killer

Allen, Charlotte Vale - Parting Gifts

Allende, Isabel - Daughter of Fortune

Alvarex, Julia - Finding Miracles
Ball, David - China Run
Bauer, Cat - Harley Like a Person
Bishop, Sheila - A Speaking Likeness
Blacker, Terence - Angel Factory
Blake, Philippa - Heat of the Moment
Bockoven, Georgia - A Marriage of Convenience
Brinkerhoff, Shirley - Second Choices
Brown, Sandra - Charade
Carlson, P. M. - Bad Blood
Cameron, Stella - Finding Ian
Chamberlain, Diane - Kiss River
Christiansen, C. B. - I See the Moon
Christopher, Nicholas - A Trip to the Stars
Clark, Mary Higgins - Nighttime is My Time
Clauser, Suzanne - A Girl Named Sooner
Coel, Margaret - Lost Bird
Cooney, Caroline B. - The Ransom of Mercy Carter
Corcoran, Barbara - Family Secrets
Crutcher, Chris - Whale Talk
Culbertson, Judi - The Nursery
D'Amato, Barbara - White Male Infant
Dart, Iris - The Stork Club
Donleavy, J. P. - Wrong Information is Being Given out at Princeton
Esstman, Barbara - The Other Anna
Feldman, Ellen - God Bless the Child
Ford, Darnella - Rising
Gabriel, Marius - House of Many Rooms
Goldsmith, Olivia - Fashionably Late
Goudge, Eileen - Taste of Honey
Harrar, George - Parents Wanted

Harris, Marilyn - Lost and Found
Hatcher, Robin - Firstborn
Henry, April - Square in the Face
Hicks, Barbara Jean - China Doll
Hite, Sid - King of Slippery Falls
Hood, Ann – Ruby; and The Red Thread
Hrdlitschka, Shelley - Dancing Naked
Irving, John - Cider House Rules
Jacobs, Jonnie - Witness for the Defense
James, P. D. - Innocent Blood
Johnson, Angela - Heaven
Jones, Kaylie - A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries
Kagan, Elaine - Somebody's Baby
Karon, Jan - A New Song
Kawabata, Yasunari - The Old Capital
Kelmal, Yashar - Salman the Solitary
Kelman, Judith - Fly away Home
Kijewski, Karen - Katapult
Kingsbury, Karen - Reunion
Kirk, Margaret P. - Gypsy
Koontz, Dean - The Mask
Lantz, Frances Lin - Someone to Love
Lachnit, Carroll - Akin to Death
Leavitt, Carolyn - Girls in Trouble
Lee, Chang-Rae - A Gesture Life
Lee, Marie G. – Somebody's Daughter
Lewis, Beverly - The Shunning
Maguire, Gregory - Missing Sisters
McAuley, Roisin - Singing Bird
MacDonald, Patricia - Mother's Day
McKay, Hilary - Saffy's Angel

Marshall, Tom - Adele at the End of the Day
Maupin, Armistead - The Night Listener
Merz, Jon F. - Danger - Close
Mishima, Yukio - The Decay of the Angel
Mitchard, Jacquelyn - A Theory of Relativity
Mortman, Doris - True Colors
Muller, Marcia - Listen to the Silence
Neufeld, John - Edgar Allan
Oke, Janette - Another Homecoming
O'Connell, Carol - Mallory's Oracle
Okimoto, Jean Davies - Molly by any Other Name
Paretsky, Sara - Total Recall
Parker, T. Jefferson - Silent Joe
Pearson, Ridley - The Pied Piper
Peart, Jane - April and May
Peck, Robert Newton - Extra Innings
Pennebaker, Ruth - Don't Think Twice
Plain, Belva - Blessings
Peterson, Tracie - The Long Awaited Child
Porcelli, Joe - The Photograph
Robards, Karen - Midnight Hour
Roberts, Gillian - Whatever Doesn't Kill You
Ross, JoAnn - Blue Bayou
Rushford, Patricia H. - Abandoned
Saul, John - Darkness
Scott, Joanna C. - The Lucky Gourd Shop
Skinner, Jeff - In the Eyes of Terror
Sleator, William - Rewind
Stevens, Brooke - Tattoo Girl
Tomey, Ingrid - The Queen of Dreamland
Tyler, Anne – Digging to America

Vogel, Jane - Fast Forward to Normal
Wall, Judith Henry - My Mother's Daughter
Wartski, Maureen Crane - The Face in My Mirror
Weinfeld, Chaya Baila - New Beginnings
Wheat, Carolyn - Fresh Kills
Whitney, Phyllis - The Golden Unicorn
Whitson, Stephanie Grace - Walks the Fire
Wiggs, Susan - Home before Dark
Yanksy, Brian - My Road Trip to the Pretty Girl Capital of the World
Yolen, Jane - The One-Armed Queen

Online Adoption Information Resources

Dave Thomas Foundation

<http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/Free-Adoption-Resources>

US Dept of Health and Human Services

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/>

State of New Jersey Dept of Children and Families

<http://www.state.nj.us/njfofosteradopt/>