

Twice the Family: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Sisterhood

Julie Ryan McGue

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Twice the Family is a memoir about faith, family, and doing right by others.

In Julie Ryan McGue's heartfelt memoir *Twice the Family*, a woman who, with her twin sister, was adopted into a devout Catholic family shares her perspectives on life, love, family, and her sense of self.

McGue's biological mother gave birth to the twins states away from their biological father and grandparents, who did not know she was pregnant. The couple who adopted them had faced multiple miscarriages in their efforts to become parents. The book covers the budding of their family and its growth toward six children through losses and hardships, showing how the twins learned to form their own values and aspirations.

In spite of the jarring prologue that imagines the moment of the twins' birth, sweetness and compassion permeate the narrative, which emphasizes the family's love, made stronger by its nuance and understanding that families need not be perfect. The twins' adoptive mother, for example, did not always deal with her previous losses well; she sometimes took her feelings out on her children. The twins dealt with worries about prejudices toward adopted children as well as their evolving personal faith. They grew up, fell in love, and became autonomous, ambitious women.

The psychology of being a child given up for adoption is explored in ways both cathartic and devastating: "I would lie in bed at night imagining [when] my birth parents ... might come back for Jenny and me ... Our other mother had done the unspeakable. She had given two babies away to strangers to raise in her place." These worries are balanced by moments that are joyful and light, upholding the book's themes of perseverance through dark moments. And religion is incorporated and credited for McGue's inner strength, too.

Its progression straightforward, the book includes time stamps above each new chapter. Some are redundant, as the narrative sets itself in time with context clues well, evoking the 1960s and 1970s with notes about adoption not yet being accepted in the zeitgeist and about women being less than welcome in the workplace.

A family album of sorts that preserves moments both big and small, the book lingers over cherished memories, as of the twins' father's silly jokes to cheer up their mother, of the twins leaving behind their childhood home, and of the twins making big moral decisions for themselves in adulthood. Its testaments to the bonds between twins are fervent, too, even as it covers squabbles and temporary rifts.

The memoir *Twice the Family* is about being raised as an adopted twin; it's a story of faith, family, and doing right by others.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN (November 11, 2024)

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