One and the Same: My Life as an Identical Twin and What I’ve Learned About Everyone’s Struggle to Be Singular by Abigail Pogrebin

Twins

Jane Isay Reviews One and the Same

Jane Isay is the author of Walking on Eggshells and the forthcoming Mom Still Likes You Best. She has been an editor for over 40 years and edited such nonfiction classics as Reviving Ophelia, Praying for Sheetrock, and Friday Night Lights. She lives in New York City, not too far from her children and grandchildren. Read her exclusive Amazon guest review of One and the Same: Abigail Pogrebin’s One and the Same: My Life As an Identical Twin and What I’ve Learned about Everyone’s Struggle to be Singular is a terrific travelogue through the world of identical--and fraternal--twins. She tells the story of the twin experience from the inside out, and shines a smart and loving light on this special relationship. Pogrebin brings heart and brains to her own experiences with her twin sister Robin, from infancy to a ripe maturity. And she has done prodigious amount of research, speaking with scores of twins--together and apart--and interviewing dozens of experts on all aspects of the twin experience.

Modern medicine has given us more multiple births every year, and so more and more people are parents of twins. When we see so many pairs of kids riding in their double strollers, we ask ourselves so many questions.

What’s going on in their little minds as they grow up together? Do they feel like they’re one person, or two? How do they relate to other kids in school? Do they feel that it’s a privilege to be a twin, or do they find it a burden? What about the social expectations that they should love each other best and should be ever so close? How do they separate enough to get married and form their own families? What is the mistake parents most often make in rearing their twins?
Abigail Pogrebin has answers to these questions and many more. In each chapter she writes a bit about her and her sister, and then brings in testimony from other twins and the experts. In addition, this book is valuable because of the light it sheds on all sibling relationships by describing the closest pairs we know. Even people without a twin in their lives—and most of us are fascinated by twins—will benefit from reading One and the Same.

If you’re considering IVF, if you are a twin or have a twin, or are married to a twin, or dating one, this book is a necessity. In addition, Abigail Pogrebin’s family is one of those singularly successful and loving ones, and basking in the warmth of her life is a pleasure.—Jane Isay

( Photo © Robin Holland)

Abigail Pogrebin on One and the Same Who knows what makes each of us feel distinctive in the world, understood, really known? If individuality is a hurdle, it’s raised that much higher when you’re a twin. I started my book, One and the Same, to plumb the depths and intricacies of growing up as a double, but also because I knew that twinship is just a magnified version of everyone’s challenge: individuality.

What made it complicated for me and my twin, Robin, are the same elements that can make it complicated for any person: a sense of being blurred, over-compared, generalized; an uncertainty whether the people in your life truly know you apart from others. Psychologist Joan Friedman, a twin and parent of twins (who counsels both) talks about the difference between being noticed, and being known. I know that difference. As an identical twin, you definitely get noticed; my sister and I were kind of famous just by virtue of looking so alike. (And okay, we were kind of cute before we hit the merciless stage of adolescence.)

But the inherent star power in twinship has a short shelf life. Ultimately you need to feel sure of a separate worth, an identity beyond twinship. If I’m not mistaken, we all need the clarity of uniqueness. What do I bring to the table? How will I leave my mark? What do I have with this friend that’s unlike what they have with someone else? It’s not that we spend all our days self-obsessed, asking how we’re special, but there’s some fundamental need to know we’re singular.

My parents could not have been more loving, stimulating, or modern in their childrearing, but it literally never occurred to them to spend time with Robin and me separately and that omission backfired at the end of the day. When I interviewed my mother for my book, and asked her why she and Dad never took us anywhere separately, she looked pained. Because we didn’t think that way, she told me. We just thought in terms of doing things as a family. I should have been aware of it because I should have been smart enough to figure out that something is gained when you’re alone with a person. I should have realized that. But it never occurred to
us. It always was a matter of Let's. Not: You come with me and you go with him.

She said they realized their mistake in one powerful instant when I was eighteen and they invited me to go with them for a weekend at a bed-and-breakfast. You said you were uncomfortable coming along because you’d never been alone with us. It was like somebody shot us between the eyes; we couldn’t believe it. ‘How could this have happened?’ We never noticed that we had never been with one child.

It was clear that you felt you had a performance level you had to keep up, my father recalls, and you felt that, without Robin, you wouldn’t be able to hold up your end in terms of pleasing us, as if that was anything you had to do. So that was a real realization that we’d missed something. I think we were always so careful to have equality of treatment that it turned out to be undifferentiated.

Psychologist Dorothy Burlingham wrote in her 1954 study of identical twins that mothers can’t connect to their twins until they get to know them apart from each other. Several mothers have plainly said that it was impossible to love their twins until they had a found a difference in them, Burlingham wrote. That could be rephrased for all of us, twin and non-twin alike: it’s impossible to feel loved, acknowledged, understood, valued unless we’re sure people have found a difference in us. Unless we’re sure we’re uncommon or particular in some way.

One and the Same is a window into the truth about twinship. But it’s also, I think, an unpacking of how we each ultimately find a way to say, Look at me alone.—Abigail Pogrebin

My Personal Review:
People called me, in lieu of my "real name", "hey twin". Everyone assumed my twin and I (who are identical) were one and the same.

My mother’s mother and her fraternal twin sister looked different enough that this didn't happen.

I am sure my sons won't suffer the same fate as I did. At least, I pray they won’t. They are fraternals. But still and all, this book was and is amazing. It is a MUST read for every mother and father parenting twins out there. It encapsulates the twin experience.

Since Abigail is a twin, she knows wherein she speaks. It takes a twin to be able to articulate the multiple/HOM experience and NO book out there about parenting twins (unless you happen to be a twin, parenting twins) and the unique identity and how careful you must be... is as succinct and helpful as this book.
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