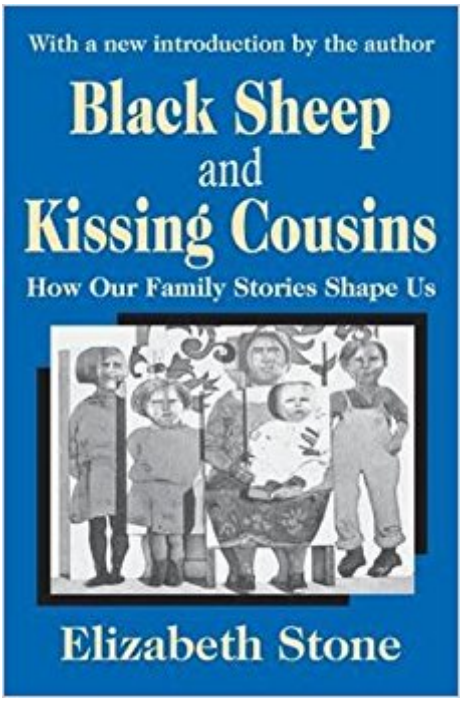
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Black Sheep And Kissing Cousins: How Our Family Stories Shape Us



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Synopsis

When someone says, at a holiday dinner table, "Oh, those Lawrence cousins lose control all the time," or "the Davises always had more talent than luck," you can be sure there’s a lesson being passed along, from one generation to another. Who tells stories to whom and about what is never a random matter. Our family stories have a secret power: they play a unique role in shaping our identity, our sense of our place in the world. The give us values, inspirations, warnings, incentives. We need them. We use them. We keep them. They reverberate throughout our lives, affecting our choices in love, work, friendship, and lifestyle. Elizabeth Stone, whose grandparents came from Italy to Brooklyn, artfully weaves her own family stories among the stories of more than a hundred people of all backgrounds, ages, and regions - clarifying for us predictable types of family legends, providing ways to interpret our own stories and their roles in our lives. She examines stories of birth, death, work, money, romantic adventure - all in the context of the family storytelling ritual. And she shows how stories about our most ancient ancestors may provide answers at milestone moments in our lives, as well as how stories about our newest family members carve out places for them so they will fit into their families, comfortably or otherwise. Upon its initial publication in 1988, Studs Terkel said that the book is "A wholly original approach to an ancient theme: family storytelling and its lasting mark on the individual." Judy Collins noted that "Elizabeth Stone’s marvelous book on family myths and fables is irresistible. It lets us in on our own secrets in a provocative and exciting way." And Maggie Scarf wrote, "What a clever topic, and how beautifully Elizabeth Stone has written about it! I recommend Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins for everyone who has ever been raised in a family."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“This sparkling book is a gift to families and all who work with them. Ã Â . . . Readers will be inspired to search their own intergenerational family myths and narratives, coming away with a clearer sense of self and enhanced sympathy for family members.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Evan Imber-Black, author of The Secret Life of Families and director, Center for Families and Health, Ackerman Institute for the Family Ã¢â ¬Å“This book is a continuing inspiration to those of us who are professional storytellers. The wisdom in the stories, along with Elizabeth StoneÃ¢â ¬â„¢s suggestions, are a valuable guide to all of us.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Peninnah Schram, associate professor of speech and drama, Stern College, Yeshiva University and author, Jewish Stories One Generation Tells Another Ã¢â ¬Å“Reading this book again, I am reminded of how important it is to our understanding of family enterprises. Families who own assets together will find the family stories regarding money, self worth, and freedom nothing short of enlightening.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Fredda Herz Brown, managing partner, The Metropolitan Group and editor of Reweaving the Family Tapestry Ã¢â ¬Å“[C]harming and appealing because of StoneÃ¢â ¬â„¢s delicate sensitivity, her wonder over the way an entire family ethos can be created out of stories Ã¢â ¬Ëœas invisible as air, as weightless as dreams.Ã¢â ¬â„¢Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Alex Raskin, Los AngelesTimes Ã¢â ¬Å“One of the marks of a bookÃ¢â ¬â„¢s private success for me is its ability to distract me from itself. I enjoy reading material that provokes daydream, pushing me outward from a statement to explore my own experience as it supports or denies what IÃ¢â ¬â„¢ve just read. . . . Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins encourages just this kind of desultory and reflexive reading.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Nancy Mairs, WomenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Review of Books Ã¢â ¬Å“Elizabeth Stone describes how the stories families tell assign roles to each person, and how those roles can become self-fulfilling prophecies.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Harriet Brown, The New York Times

Elizabeth Stone is professor of English, Communication, and Media Studies at Fordham University and author of The Hunter College Campus Schools for the Gifted and A Boy I Once Knew: What a Teacher Learned from her Student. Elizabeth Stone is professor of English, Communication, and Media Studies at Fordham University and author of The Hunter College Campus Schools for the Gifted and A Boy I Once Knew: What a Teacher Learned from her Student.

I use this book nearly ever year as a reference in designing college courses on family (family myths,

family as a subculture, family memoir writing), and sometimes also as part of students' assigned or recommended reading for the course. Reading this book (or parts of it) alongside a range of other texts--memoir, fiction, film, visual art--students have reported that a) they loved it and b) they have not liked it at all. Some complain that it moves too ploddingly, adding that they wish there were more analysis, more discussion using a variety of theoretical frameworks and scholarship. On the other hand, for many students, Stone's own family story and her analysis of its themes, preoccupations, myths, and values has served as a charming, accessible entry into considerations of their own families and the legacies passed down to them. Stone has also gathered primary source material from many interviews, and has organized them into categories that students and I find useful as a starting model for thinking and discussing family themes, and later, for structuring the material they gather through their own research.

The ideas presented in this book, are interesting to think about in regards to each individual's family. However, this updated version only had an introductory chapter to address changes in the story and new research. A lazy approach to an update, and leaving misinformation in many chapters. I would recommend a more recently published volume in this same area of interest, as there are many available.

Very interesting, especially for those of us with grown children.

I read this book when it was first published. I thought then and I still think the subject has great possibilities. But family stories without context are just that. While Stone has some interesting interpretations, it is difficult to evaluate them on the basis of the information she presents.

I found this book to be most interesting because it made me think about my own family stories in an entirely new way. Why do we care about certain traits, how we define ourselves, what measures success - the answers are buried in those family stories - the ones we choose to retell, that is. I have used this book in classes, as well as in rethinking my own family. Fun, and thought provoking.

This book is fascinating to read because it will remind you of your own family stories and lead to self reflection. I reexamined some of my own family myths and legends and discovered, what I believe, are new understandings which were previously not obvious.For example: The 'fried chicken story' my mom always told about how bad a cook she was when she first married my dad and how,

regardless of what poor meals she'd been cooking for him, he would rave to family & friends about how her fried chicken was fantastic. He never even mentioned to her that her cooking was often crap, just complimented the hell out of her fried chicken, which she says she prepared several times a week until her cooking abilities improved. "Great" my dad would say, "fried chicken". She never broached the subject openly either because she was ashamed that she was so bad at such an important and expected(this was the 50's)skill. My mom always told this story to illustrate how my father,who was not a patient or overtly supportive person, came through for her when it was something that he really could have hurt her feelings over.Once I read this book I got a different perspective. The old 'elephant in the room' idea - a big theme for my family. Don't talk about problems & they'll go away. Don't acknowledge difficulties and offer help (like a cook book or lessons), just ignore it. Which is not to say my mom's take is entirely wrong, it's just probably not the only thing going on. Because no one likes fried chicken that much.

What a great product. It has a lot of interesting stories about how your own family can be very entertaining.

Was an interesting read

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