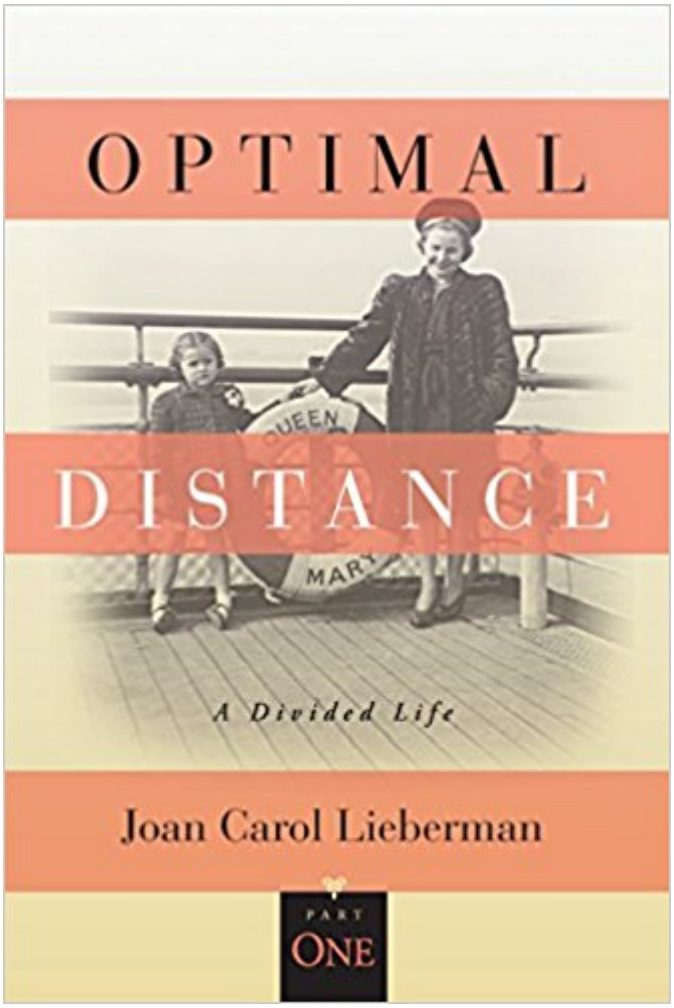
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Optimal Distance: A Divided Life, Part One (Volume 1)



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Synopsis

Part Oneof Joan Carol LiebermanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s two-part autobiography, OPTIMAL DISTANCE, A Divided Life, reveals the genesis of her family in prose and photographs. The bookÃ¢â ¬â„¢s title comes from early recognition that her survival was dependent on maintaining a safe distance from her mother, the descendant of prominent Mormon pioneers, who tragically developed paranoid schizophrenia at the time of the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s birth. Perpetually alert to the distance between herself and others, her narrative draws upon the attachment theory of D.W. Winnicott, British pediatrician and psychoanalyst. Part One includes two of the five smaller books found in this autobiography: the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Ã¢â ¬Å“CHILDHOODÃ¢â ¬Â• from her birth as a Gentile in Salt Lake City in 1942 to her first pregnancy in 1962 in Berkeley; and Ã¢â ¬Å“MOTHERHOODÃ¢â ¬Â• from 1963, when the author gave birth to her daughter, to her motherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s death on the morning of the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fortieth birthday in June 1982. The authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s father was a federal research entomologist assigned to conduct the first experiments using DDT for agricultural purposes in Delta, Utah. He was born in Newark, New Jersey, but spent most of his childhood in Ogden, Utah. He was distantly related to Simon Bamberger, the only Jewish governor of Utah. After World War II, he was transferred from Delta to Logan, Utah, where he headed the USDA lab at Utah State. It was in Logan that the author found safe harbor in the Mormon Church. When she was five, she followed a playmate to a Ward House, where her presence was welcomed. Knowing her mother would never follow her there, she felt the Mormon Church was a safe place to hide. Or as she writes: Ã¢â ¬Å“I always felt like a small wild animal desperately trying to hide from danger among a large herd of domineering dairy cows.Ã¢â ¬Â• At age eight, she went to the Mormon Temple alone to be baptized. At fourteen, her father was transferred to Bozeman, Montana, and the author left Utah and Mormonism behind. Less than a year later, her father was sent to Bakersfield, California, where she graduated from high school. During high school she was a National Science Fair winner and finally learned the name and cause of her motherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s mental illness. In that era, most psychiatric experts believed schizophrenia was caused by Ã¢â ¬Å“perverse mothering.Ã¢â ¬Â• Having had nothing but that, the author concluded that she was doomed, a fear that haunted her for the next twenty years, even as she began a hopeless quest to heal her mother. After studies at the University of California at Berkeley, Joan Carol Lieberman traveled in Europe and worked as a medical volunteer in Africa, where she contracted Yellow Fever. By the time she returned to America, her father had been transferred to Tucson, Arizona. The first night she was home from Africa, her mother made an attempt on her life. She committed her mother to a Tucson hospital where she was treated for the

first time with the first pyschotropic drug, Thorazine. After a month in Tucson, the author returned to Berkeley to continue her studies. Increasingly resilient, she was able to withstand the sadness of her motherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s illness, even while she faced an illegitimate pregnancy, shotgun marriage, divorce, and single-working-motherhood. Granted excommunication from the Mormon Church on the grounds of apostasy in 1966, she moved to Northern Idaho to finish her thesis on leadership. After accepting a managerial position in Boulder, Colorado, she began breaking through the glass ceilings facing women and never stopped. Her poignant, detailed journey is both exhaustively researched and intimately personal. Locales include: Salt Lake City, Delta, and Logan, Utah; Yellowstone, Wyoming; Bozeman, Montana; Bakersfield and Berkeley, California; Europe; Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Troy, Idaho; Boulder, Colorado.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A searingly honest chronicle of motherhood and mental illness, drawn from the bittersweet memories of a daughter. Kirkus ReviewsThis book was on her husband's bucket list. Reading it should be on yours. Monroe E. Price, J.D., Director of the Annenberg Center for Global Communications, University of PennsylvaniaMaybe astounding stories like those in OPTIMAL DISTANCE only happen to people who can tell them with her sensitivity and skill. Joan Carol Lieberman's wise narrative shines and inspires. Ã Â Patricia Hampl, MacArthur Fellow and author of four memoirs: A Romantic Education, Virgin Time, I Could Tell You Stories, and The Florist's Daughter.Part One of OPTIMAL DISTANCE, A Divided Life, is a profound exploration

of the nature of attachment and mental illness. Ã Â Joan Carol Lieberman's mother developed paranoid schizophrenia in 1942, shortly after her birth. Ã Â For the next four decades, until her mother's death in 1982, prominent experts continued to blame schizophrenia on "inadequate mothering"-- labeling the mother of those suffering from schizophrenia as "schizophrenogenic" or "refrigerator mothers." Ã Â The author's heartfelt narrative of how she sought optimal distance from her mother's dangerous impulses is a memorable reminder of how much damage was done to patients and their families by mistaken theorists like Frieda Fromm-Reichman and John Nathaniel Rosen. Ã Â More importantly, she reminds us of how far we have yet to go to find a cure for this devastating disease which strikes one out of every one hundred of us. Andrew Solomon, writer and lecturer on psychology, winner of the National Book Award for The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression.Ã Â

OPTIMAL DISTANCE, A Divided Life, is a complex and compelling autobiography that covers the whole of Joan Carol LiebermanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s personal history. As a young child, she became expert in managing the psychological and physical distance between herself and others because to survive she had to keep a safe distance from her paranoid schizophrenic mother, who suffered from episodic murderous impulses. Having spent her life in close proximity to death because of her mother, she learned how difficult it is for human beings to face mortality, regardless of their religious beliefs. Part One begins during and after World War II in Utah, in two small Mormon communities, Delta and Logan. During the first half of the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s life, it was the long era when many experts believed schizophrenia was caused by Ã¢â ¬Å“perverse motheringÃ¢â ¬Â•and before any anti-psychotic medications were developed. The author becomes a mother herself while a student at UC Berkeley and faces many economic challenges trying to finish her education. When her mother dies on the morning of the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fortieth birthday, she considers it to be the greatest gift her mother ever gave her. Part Two opens with the author feeling as if she has a second chance at life after her motherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s death and the birth of her second child. However, not long after starting motherhood all over again, she meets new obstacles, including metastatic breast cancer. The details of her treatments and what happens to other mothers with young children are poignant reminders of how dependent we are on others. With the close proximity of death, the author stops looking forward for hope and to instead begins to look back in search of meaning. In seeking the secrets of her ancestors, she discovers the new science of epigenetics. Her open and honest narrative inspires readers to reflect on their own relationships, their inevitable deaths, and their spiritual beliefs. Joan Carol Lieberman has been a management consultant for forty years and

continues to advise and write for long-term clients. A finalist for the Bakeless Literary Prize, she was invited to attend Bread Loaf WritersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ Conference as a Bakeless Scholar in 1999. It was there that she began writing her autobiography, an eighteen year effort that she finished on her seventy-fifth birthday in June 2017. Married, she is the mother of two grown children, and lives in Boulder, Colorado.

The author describes her personal ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœhubrisÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ in this book and I will take a little piece of that in writing this review. I read a lot. I read both fiction and non-fiction. In this case, the author has written an autobiography. I am not a big fan of this writing format, as it lends the writer to overstating some aspects of the his/her life that can distract from the greater story. I felt that Nelson Mandela worked too hard in his to reassure the readers that he was not the sole leader or author of the movement that lead to the end of Apartheid of South Africa. Anyone with a modicum of historical realism knows that was a fact and the repeated deference to those who worked with him sometimes became a distraction in his book. In GhandiÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s autobiography he irritated me completely with his fastidious descriptions of his character flaws to the point that I think it limited the overarching reality of his life story (an effort to prove he was human just like the rest of us, which we do know.). It is important to see the flaws when you see how served the authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s fuller story, but overburdening the reader with unnecessary repetitions is a serious distraction.In Eleanor RooseveltÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s life story, she was better served by her biographer than her own writing. She was fettered in her autobiography in the way she presented (or did not present) the parts of her life that were probably the most inspiring and significant for someone who wants to know the reality of womenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s roles and challenges at any level. She could not achieve the objective reflection that Blanch Weisen Cook was able to delineate with her skilled writing and insight.In Joan Carol LiebermanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s case, I read both volumes of Optimal Distance within a week. Separating the story as she did was an excellent decision in describing how her story evolved. Her skillful writing style is what re-created the dynamic story of her life and integrated it with the full settings wherein it evolved. It incorporated multiple perspectives without becoming bogged down in exaggerated self-flagellation or deprecation. She has not simply delivered the sequencing of her life events with extraordinary honesty and openness, but she has developed them thematically and has richly interwoven history of the time she lived through personally, religiously and politically. Her wit is testimony to her strength and what eventually brought her through the bleakest of times. The way it prevails throughout is a gift to the reader, when it might seem to us, that nothing was actually funny at all.As she told the other stories,

beyond her struggle-filled one with her mother that is key to the book - as she grew beyond her birth family unit and into the formation her own family unit as an adult wife and mother, we can see the delicacy of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“optimal distanceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and how difficult it is to achieve it, even with a fully conscious effort to work on it. She has truly had a powerfully-lived life. What she shares with the readers is informative and empowering for us as well. It admits to the limits of the human condition, but still holds out for growth beyond them. She has allowed herself to bring her most naked psychological and spiritual self to the page without trying to manipulate or dilute the imagery.JoanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ability to bring schizophrenia to light through her familyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s story at this highly personal level, impacts the reader as it presents the current dearth of treatment options that still remain in the for mental illness. We recognize how little research existed in the 40ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s when her story began, but it has virtually remained unchanged. Our culture still largely views mental illness as shameful and unspeakable. Even with the change in attitudes toward depression, we still seek to discuss it as something experienced by ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“othersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and we are reluctant to share our personal need for care. The treatment options particularly for schizophrenia, remain draconian. Diagnostics have improved only slightly. Research in neuroscience and the chemistry of the brain along with JoanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s new-found love for epigenetics are still fields in infancy. Money is not made available for the research or the treatment so desperately needed - profit seems to be marginal. Hopefully her story will lend its intelligence to our movement forward at all levels.

A truly gripping read that left me feeling a new sense of awe and wonder for the amazingly beautiful and deeply tragic thing we call life. From the authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s candid description of the horrors she endured as a child to her journey developing a life of her ownÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œwith myriad setbacks and pitfallsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œI felt as if I were inside the mind of the embodiment of resilience. Humor, clear-sighted reflection, and a deep sense of duty drive the narrative across decades of life lived with fortitude and grace, described with moving, wondrous prose. Wandering through these pages lead to my own impassioned excavation of self. It broadened my perspective and left me feeling enriched and enlivened. I am not one to review but this is truly a must read.

This book was hard to put down. You enter the author’s life and are experiencing events both frightening, funny and heartbreaking right along side her. I was able to relate to some aspects of her life, but many were new to me, such as Morman views and being a cancer survivor. The pictures the

author paints with her words is so vivid, I found myself replaying them in my mind after putting it down. I highly recommend this book. I'm going to order book 2 next. I'm hooked.

Wow-powerful writing about a subject mostly hidden in our society. Joan's story is not depressing as I thought it might be, but rather uplifting and a tribute to the human spirit.

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