



Daughter of the Queen of Sheba: A Memoir

Jacki Lyden

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As an adult, National Public Radio foreign correspondent **Jacki Lyden** has spent her life on the front lines of some of the world's most dangerous war zones. As a child, she lived in a war zone of a different kind. Her mother, Dolores, suffered from what is now called manic depression; but when Jacki was growing up in a small Midwestern town, Dolores was simply called crazy. In her manic phases, Dolores became Marie Antoinette or the Queen of Sheba, exotically delusional and frightening, yet to young Jacki also transcendent, even inspiring. In time, Jacki grew to accept, even relish, Dolores's bizarre episodes, marveling at her mother's creative energy and using it to fuel her own. Heartbreaking, hilarious, and lyrical, this memoir of a mother-daughter relationship is a testimony to obstinate devotion in the face of bewildering illness.

Daughter of the Queen of Sheba: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review *Daughter of the Queen of Sheba: A Memoir* for online ebook

Lisa DeBenedictis says

Jacki Lyden is as poignant and important in prose as she is on the front lines of broadcast journalism's war-torn daily headlines. She is a writer who bares her soul and twists a braided pigtail of wit and wisdom into a crowning glory of beauty. She takes her readers on a personal adventure of love and bewilderment. This memoir is a solicitous inquiry into the soul of a mother-daughter relationship bequeathed with the sagacity of hindsight and benevolence. It's brave and memorable and durable.

Nina says

Jackie Lyden is a foreign correspondent for NPR in America, so her memoir was written with such eloquence that it was almost poetic to read. The memoir probes into the haze of mental illness, revealing a story of isolation and suffering, on both her side, and her mothers. It also reveals the immense, lasting impact of relationships, and the importance of love in overcoming life's difficulties. Definitely a must read, as it perfectly encapsulates the "mania" of bipolar disorder, while examining the social implications of the disease.

Karyl says

An amazing memoir of a daughter struggling with her mother's mental instability throughout much of her life. I have no idea who Jacki Lyden is, not having listened to NPR much in my life, but I was drawn into the story from the very beginning, with the first instance of the "Queen of Sheba," Lyden's mother's manic alter ego, appearing when Lyden was about twelve.

I have been watching warily for her ever since, but never so hard as when my mother slips off into the caverns where the past and present and future are etched together. You could say that my life as her daughter, the life of my imagination, began with my mother's visions. My sisters and I took them for our texts. Her madness was our narrative line. I am trying to decipher that line still, for its power and meaning over our past.

For just like that, our lives had a way of falling prey to her guile, as my mother herself fell, a slippage, a breath, nothing very great, no time to look back, to grab each other's hands. Just my mother turning around to say, "I must be dreaming," and our lives fell away at a touch, mine with hers -- throughout my life as a college student, girlfriend, journalist in Belfast or Baghdad, Chicago or London, the life that paralleled her life as a cocktail waitress, a hotel clerk, a model. Reality fell in waves with unreality, commingling, and washed out to sea.

It is amazing to me how much Lyden went on to accomplish in her life after having such a shattered childhood. Not only was her mother dancing with mental illness, but her stepfather mentally and physically abused her. It always amazes me how much people who were raised in adversity can find themselves accomplishing.

I really enjoyed Lyden's writing. It had almost a dream-like quality, a cadence that swept the reader along with the frustration and guilt that Lyden and her sisters felt in dealing with their sick mother. But it is clear in the end that no matter what, Lyden loves her mother with everything she is, and it is this unbreakable bond and its force in Lyden's life that is so compelling.

Shelly says

Book #39 for 2011 - I had the hardest time reading this memoir written by a daughter of a manic depressive (bipolar) mother. I have read other books of the same variety (and enjoyed them) but this book really dragged me down into the pit of bipolar disorder. I also was not a big fan of the author's writing style.

Davis Aujourd'hui says

I was attracted to this book after seeing the author on Oprah Winfrey. My reason for this attraction was deeply personal. I, too, have dealt with the challenges of living with a bipolar disorder. It is no walk in the park!

This is a beautiful and sensitively written story about a daughter's journey with her mother who suffers from manic depression. Despite the horrifying aspects of the illness with its inherent and dramatic unpredictability, the author manages to embrace her mother with love and look at the humorous side of a sad situation.

Yes, it is dark. That goes with the territory. Yet it will open doors of understanding to those who have no comprehension of what is a prevalent though highly treatable form of mental illness. It will especially mean a lot to people who have borne the trauma of the disease within themselves or among those they love.

Davis Aujourd'hui, author of "The Misadventures of Sister Mary Olga Fortitude"

David says

I can't improve on Sue Hubbell's back cover blurb:

"Here is the story behind the rum-and-raisin radio voice -- a good story it is, and beautifully written, too."

See, that sentence is why Sue Hubbell is a writer, and I am not. I'd probably have come up with something crass like:

"A definite cut above your average 'mama was a fruitcake' memoir, by NPR's second-most mellifluous* female reporter".

*: obviously, nobody can compete with the incomparable Sylvia Poggioli.

The jacket cover on my copy of this book is considerably less racy than what goodreads is showing you.

Hippiemom says

I thought this would be a good read. After 2 attempts- I just cannot read another page. The writing is superfluous and tedious. This may have been an interesting memoir if the author hadn't felt the need to write in such a pretentious style. Less is often more.

Terry says

Hmm, what to say about this book? I was working in Borders in Boston at the time it was released and I remember there being a bit of a fuss about it (all those NPR fanatics out there, you know). I think Jackie Lyden's writing style is fascinating--it's almost surreal at times. I mean that in the sense it's sort of poetic and feverish at the same time, and thus, somewhat fragmented, or fragmentary. So I enjoyed/admired that aspect of the book. Her story is probably not terribly new to anyone who reads any books about "dysfunctional families" or mad relatives. By mad I mean mentally ill. Anyway. I wanted to really love this book but I think that her writing style, as admirable as it is, sort of kept me at a distance. I admired the book but did not fall into it the way I wanted to.

Therese says

This lady is a poet, not a memoirist. Every thought she has is stated, then restated in verbose poetical metaphor. Through the whole thing. Wandering, mish mashy. Every now and then she touches down on something solid, something fascinating...but she doesn't linger there. Off to more twirling, swirling effervescent whirlygigs of beautiful pain described opaquely.

Or maybe I'm just in a mood.

Ann says

This book is often compared to the Liar's Club, but I don't really think it holds a candle to it. Another memoir about growing up with an unstable mother. The author spends a lot of time building up her mother into an almost mythical creature. As a result, there isn't as much introspection as I'd hoped.

Glen Coco says

My professor loves this book, but it is all about the author's "crazy" mother and all the things she does because of her mental illness. It seemed to ignore who the mother was as a person and treat her as a

spectacle, which is not okay.

Kirsten says

I remember loving this when I read it. I do believe it begins strong and dissolves a bit in the end....but if you have lived with a mentally ill parent who just so happens to have believe in make believe, it makes you say "Ah, yes."

Lennie says

In this memoir, Jacki Lyden describes growing up in Wisconsin with a mother who suffered from mental illness. During her episodes of manic-depression, her mother would become other people; sometimes she was the daughter of a mob boss or the wife of a Milwaukee brew master and other times she was the CEO of a home-decorating company. Then there were the times that her mother believed she was the Queen of Sheba. When she became the Queen of Sheba her mother would dress up in bed sheets and wear a tiara on her head. She would then proceed to "give" her daughters the countries of Mesopotamia, Thebes, and Carthage as personal gifts from herself. No matter how bizarre her mother's behavior became, Jacki always remembered the "normal" mother from her childhood; the one who sang her songs, baked banana bread when she had nightmares, and who would cut up old ball gowns to turn her daughters into Miss America contestants at Fourth of July parades.

I think it took a lot of courage for this author to write this memoir. I admire the way she came away from her experience without anger or bitterness and had only unconditional love for her mother. She could have easily held it against her but instead she chose to accept her mother, illness and all. I would recommend this book to psychology students or anyone who has a family member with mental illness.

Ann says

Niet altijd even sterk geschreven. Haar taalgebruik is soms overdreven ingewikkeld, vooral als ze over zichzelf schrijft. Vreemd voor een journalist. Maar als ze over haar grootmoeder en moeder verteld is het een prachtig boek.

Kelly B says

I had to read this book for my class, Severely and Persistently Mentally Ill Clients. I liked it, although being that it was for class and I was on a deadline, I wasn't able to appreciate how descriptively verbose the author is. Her writing is poetic and beautiful, but sometimes it was a bit too much for me.

It is the story of her mother, who has Bipolar I Disorder, although a rare type in which she is almost constantly in a manic state. It is pretty astonishing how devastating the disease was on her life--she spent all

of her money, and became anorexic because of her inability to sit still long enough to eat anything. She accrued huge medical bills from her hospital stays, she put herself in dangerous situations, and she filed many, many lawsuits and legal briefs filled with rants. On the positive side, she was extremely creative, exciting, and charismatic. She was probably addicted to the spontaneity of her mania, and who wouldn't be?! But the pain her daughters experienced because of it was excruciating--I can't even imagine the helplessness they felt during the course of their mother's illness, watching her destroy her life over twenty years of mania.
