



CAMPERDOWN ELM PUBLISHING, LLC
P.O. BOX 39, BOULDER, CO 80302

Reviews

OPTIMAL DISTANCE, A Divided Life, Part One

“A searingly honest chronicle of motherhood and mental illness drawn from the bittersweet memories of a daughter.”

Kirkus Review--Full review follows.

“A profound autobiographical exploration of the nature of attachment and mental illness in Mormon Utah. Joan Carol Lieberman’s mother developed paranoid schizophrenia in Delta, Utah, shortly after the author’s birth in 1942. Her poignant narrative of how she sought optimal distance from her mother’s dangerous paranoid impulses is a powerful reminder of the urgent need to find a cure for schizophrenia, a devastating disease that strikes one out of every one hundred of us.”

Andrew Solomon, award winning author of *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity*

OPTIMAL DISTANCE, A Divided Life, Part Two

“A memorable, rewarding family saga of familial love and unbridled determination.”

Kirkus Review--Full review follows.

“A narrative autopsy of an American life. Joan Carol Lieberman’s phenomenal autobiography is a case study in the science of epigenetics and a powerful reminder of the importance of our ancestral inheritances.”

Richard C. Francis, author of *The Ultimate Mystery of Inheritance - Epigenetics*.

OPTIMAL
DISTANCE*A Divided Life*

by

Joan Carol Lieberman

Kirkus Review of Part One, posted online July 11, *Kirkus Review* Issue August 15, 2017

In the first of author and speechwriter Lieberman's two-part history—a massively researched endeavor 18 years in the making—she unveils the genesis of her family life through heartfelt prose and generous photographs. The book's title is derived from the autonomy the author strived to achieve in order to feel wholly at peace with what she calls a shameful family secret: her mother Margaret's lifelong struggle with paranoid schizophrenia. Life became challenging early on as the daughter of an atheist father and a mother who heard the "voices of a god and a devil." Lieberman diligently retraces her parents' individual histories, reaching back to her mother's birth to a Mormon family in Utah and the blind date that would seal her romantic fate with the author's father, Frank. Though the marriage of a Mormon-raised daughter to a gentile raised eyebrows in Salt Lake City, their union produced the author, the surviving female twin from a complicated pregnancy (her brother died in childbirth). Years later, her mother began hearing demonic voices that incapacitated her, while Lieberman found supreme solace in the safe havens of next-door neighbor Marlene Evans, the Mormon Church, and her Aunt Mary's home. In sharing cherished anecdotes and resonant memories, the author effectively exorcises the demons of a youth spent searching for answers and knowing "my mother was both dangerous and deeply disturbed." As the author learned lessons about death, money, driving, and jealousy, a stint abroad helped her mature into a woman capable of love and motherhood even as the Vietnam War raged on and the irrational fear that she would develop schizophrenia loomed. Lieberman rightfully labels schizophrenia as an incurable "human disaster." As a child, her mother's paranoid hallucinations of "invisible demons" were random and frightening, and Lieberman's portrayal of Margaret's further descent is palpably disturbing and sorrowful. Yet it also presents the author as an increasingly formidable and resilient woman able to withstand the sadness of her mother's illness with the fortitude of a well-adjusted adult. Her poignant, painstakingly detailed journey is both exhaustive and intimately personal.

A searingly honest chronicle of motherhood and mental illness drawn from the bittersweet memories of a daughter.

OPTIMAL
DISTANCE*A Divided Life*

by

Joan Carol Lieberman

Kirkus Review of Part 2, posted July 24, 2017

Lieberman's (*Optimal Distance: A Divided Life, Part One*, 2017) autobiography continues with this second installment, which resumes her story just after her schizophrenic mother's passing.

Near the start of this book, the author eloquently equates her mother's death to "an amputation that left behind a phantom limb still sending alarm signals to my brain." The event also gave the author a new perspective on her own fate and "definitely made me eager to start my life over." With remarkable recollection, she retraces her own life after her mother became a memory, unhurriedly recounting decades of devoted child-rearing and pet raising, and the joys and struggles of her career and family life. When her own daughter moved away to college, she reconsidered the surgery that prevented her from having further pregnancies, despite her husband's initial objections. She reversed the procedure and had a son, Eben, in 1983, 20 years after the birth of her first child, Olivia. A struggle against breast cancer clouded her mid-40s, but she managed to start a preschool and experienced great improvement after treatment with an experimental drug. Even so, she endured an unforeseen remission in 1992, which reframed her life once more. Later, she went on to care for her mother-in-law in Florida. The daily foibles and adventures of the author and her mother-in-law in these later pages add some welcome levity and humor to this impassioned autobiography and demonstrate the author's talent for zesty prose, before the predication of her own declining health takes over the book's concluding chapters. Still, as readers may expect after the last volume, Lieberman effectively shows how her abiding spirit delivers her from death's door again and again. Although the sunny skies in this remembrance often seem to be few and far between, readers will still get immense satisfaction from knowing that Lieberman made it through—and that she has happiness, love, and precious children to show for it. As in her first installment, the author generously supplies family photographs that greatly embellish and enhance her moving chronicle of motherhood.

A memorable, rewarding family saga of familial love, and unbridled determination.