Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret

Editorial Reviews

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\*Starred Review\* Throughout her life, Luxenberg’s mother, Beth, reveled in her status as an only child. Then, a few years before her death in 1999—and utterly out of the blue—she admitted to having a mentally and physically disabled younger sister named Annie, who died in 1972. Beth’s failing health precluded Luxenberg and his siblings from learning any more. After Beth’s passing, Luxenberg set out in search of answers. His dual roles as reporter and son proved both blessing and curse; the journalist dug furiously for facts, while the son wondered if long-buried secrets were best kept that way. His questions were many: What prompted Annie’s commitment, at age 21, to Eloise Hospital, southeastern Michigan’s sprawling psychiatric facility? Why was there next to no record of her early years? Most baffling of all, why did Beth, two years Annie’s senior, refuse for so long to acknowledge her sibling’s existence? Armed with superb investigative skills and relentless determination, Washington Post senior editor Luxenberg tracked down remaining family and friends and interviewed an exhaustive list of experts who might shed light on Annie’s plight. Part memoir, part mystery, part history of the mental-health movement, Annie’s Ghosts is a fascinating account of a life lived in the shadows and a family beset by despair.

--Allison Block