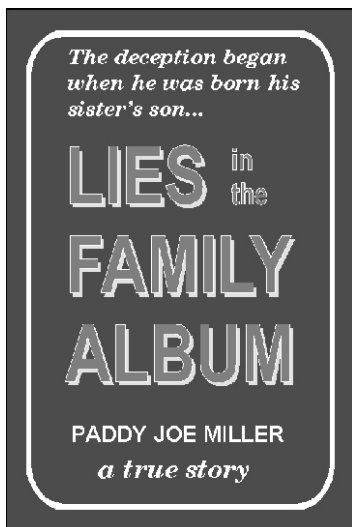


# Lies in the Family Album

BY PADDY JOE MILLER

A SYNOPSIS

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Most of us are fortunate enough to hold fond childhood memories of our families. We remember the way our mother scolded us, more out of a sense of duty than moral outrage. We recall how she comforted and protected us when we felt altogether vulnerable, with a whole, unfeeling world pitted against us. And some of us also have memories of siblings, who alternately teased and opened themselves to us.

On the surface, Paddy Joe Miller was no different. Born to a family struggling to survive in the post-boom desolation of the Pennsylvania coal country, he shared these memories with nine brothers and sisters and, for the most part, got by pretty well. There was never quite enough of anything to go around, but a kid can grow accustomed to lack, as he can grow accustomed to just about anything else.

**“A poignant coming-of-age tale; Miller is a natural-born storyteller, with a sharp ear for dialect.”**

— KSC Reviews

It was at the age of twenty-four that Miller’s memories, his sense of understanding and trust, and, indeed, his whole life, came crashing down around him. By some weird twist of fate, he stumbled upon a truth that had been successfully hidden from him his entire life: *The woman he had always known as his older sister was really his mother, and his mother was really his grandmother.*

This shocking scenario was laid before him, sending his mind reeling back to a time when he was ten, and one of his sisters had fallen from the halls of stringent Catholic “grace” by announcing that she was pregnant with her boyfriend’s child, and intended to marry him. To make matters altogether worse, she’d defied her parents’ utter disapproval of the union by running off and eloping. The memories of that tumultuous episode must have come rushing back to Paddy like the explosion of black dust that so often heralded an “incident” in the mines, the result being no less choking to a young man than the soot which turned so many men old before their time. And then, a few years after this event, there had been another enigmatic family situation, regarding the mysterious circumstances of his youngest brother’s birth. Now here was this shocking revelation about Paddy’s own parentage. How many more lies and deceptions was his family hiding from the world?

From this time forward, Paddy became all but obsessed with learning every shred of the truth that had been withheld from him for so long. Unfortunately, his family members, as keepers of the keys to that sacred vault, were no less obsessed with main-

taining their veil of deceit. To a member, they proved that they would rather see a family fall apart than to shatter an illusion they had worked so hard to create. Miller’s story is the history of his family’s disintegration, and of his pain in knowing that those closest to him cared more for their sense of image than for the well being of a shattered child.

Beyond being a chronicle of pain, ***Lies in the Family Album*** is a testament to the human capacity for overcoming adversity, for stepping beyond the confines of a cocoon that to most people is, nurturing, yet for the author was a disease. It is a story of a man who learns to stand, alone, and confront the most formidable of foes. The diseased cocoon remains, yet the author has long since emerged from its grasp, to seek his own success and happiness.

***Lies in the Family Album*** is not a happy book; there are no heartfelt reunions, no characters who are enlightened to the error of their ways. Yet, it is a book filled with hope. It is within this sense of hope that the story’s strength lies. For even as the author’s family chooses to languish in its own stagnant pool of dysfunction, Miller himself chooses to live his own life, relegating the nightmares of years gone by to its rightful place upon his library shelf, and to the occasionally muttered, “What if...”

For readers facing their own nightmare, the book’s greatest gift may be to help them build their own shelf, upon which they may place that nightmare. And then perhaps they may move beyond the terrible circumstances of their lives, and once again truly begin to live. ■

***Lies in the Family Album*, by Paddy Joe Miller • Trade paperback, 256 pp., \$12.95  
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