

SISTER SALTY
Sister Sweet



A MEMOIR OF
SIBLING RIVALRY

by SHANNON KRING BIRO &
NATALIE KRING

Sister Salty, Sister Sweet: A Memoir of Sibling Rivalry

Shannon Kring Biro , Natalie Kring

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At four, Shannon Kring spends her days stuffing anything she can get her hands on into her red leather suitcase, playing *60 Minutes* with her Barbie dolls, and basking in the limelight cast on her by her over-attentive mother. Then her sister Natalie is born. Everyone loves the well-behaved baby-grocery store clerks, bank tellers, and to Shannon's horror, her parents. Realizing she isn't the novelty she once was, Shannon reclaims her parents' attention by playing with matches, chewing her father's tobacco, and calling her cat a "cocksucky." Once placed in the background, Natalie is kept there though Shannon's playroom domination and dramatic schemes. Convinced her sister is the favored child-which she demonstrates through drawing a gift graph to document the injustice as evidenced through uneven gift counts-Natalie takes to her room, where she regularly holds pity parties: staring in the mirror in awe at the sad-clown contortions of her face, her nose growing pink and puffy, her upper lip morphing into a hideous frown. When Shannon is confronted by dramas not of her own making-a sexual assault and her consequent anorexia-she is for the first time envious of her sister's anonymity. Natalie, who was sheltered from the truth of her sister's situation, sees only the attention and now craves it more than ever. *Sister Salty, Sister Sweet* is a coming-of-age story with dark humor, straight-up characterizations, and bald honesty. It is supported by characters such as Grandpa Orv, who scratches or burns his name into all his possessions, and their grandmother Gabby, who dreams of evil nuns, keeps a Gerber jar of holy water on her microwave, and who the girls' father simply refers to as Nutcase. From puberty and neighborhood pranks to first loves and leaving home, the sisters jockey for standing within their family, struggle to establish common ground, and ultimately find their places in the world and with each other.

Sister Salty, Sister Sweet: A Memoir of Sibling Rivalry Details

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Anna says

It was hard not to feel nostalgic while reading this book. It's a memoir about two sisters growing up in rural Wisconsin in 1980s/90s. The chapters alternate between sisters so you get to hear the story of their childhoods through the two varying points of view. Natalie, the younger sister, is much more introverted while Shannon is an extrovert and deals with an eating disorder and major body image issues. They both analyze the dysfunctional relationship that their mother had with her mother (their grandmother) and how that impacted her role as a mother. They also describe their relationship with their father and younger brother and eventually come to realize that they are content with who they have become.

It's not the best book in the world and I think it's hard to take it seriously in some ways because it seems like the content is not necessarily "book material." I guess what I am trying to say is that my sister and I could have written a very similar tale of our childhoods and I don't necessarily think it would be worthy of publishing. I think everyone's got an interesting and unique story to tell that is very personal to them, but I question whether or not this particular story needed to become a book. There are definitely things I liked about it and I don't want to underscore that, but at the same time I don't think the characters and their problems stand out in any great way that would make this a must-read.

Katie Lynn says

I enjoyed this book. An honest account of family life and sibling relationships. Not a keeper on my shelf, but a good read.

Linda Varela says

What I learned . . . I'm glad I have the sister I do, and that no matter how dysfunctional I feel my childhood may have been, there's always someone who had it worse. I felt depressed after reading this, because you just think that maybe they'd both have felt better about themselves if they'd had each other as a support system growing up.

Valerie says

I was surprised that I ended up liking this, after the first few (too brief) chapters. It's one of those books where the blurb on the back reveals all the humor and all the humor happens in the first couple of chapters. But there were deeper issues in the Kring family, and those weren't blurbed about - and the back and forth style between Shannon Kring Biro and Natalie Kring made for a strong presentation. While I disagree that if you liked *The Glass Castle* you'll like this book (as it says in the back of book blurb), it was a light read that was surprisingly good, for what it is.

Caffers says

I liked it..., not sure I 'REALLY' liked it; would rather give it a 3+. But since I can't do that, I'm feeling generous and will give it 4 stars.

It was an enjoyable read, but there were things I would have liked better. Hearing more about the authors as kids, for instance. Their reminiscing as children was much more interesting than their stories as teens/adults. Some of the side characters in the book never really developed, and as they were mentioned later in the book I found myself wondering who they were even talking about.

I think I wanted it to be more of a 'Girl named Zippy' kinda book, which I Loved. Still, it was good.

Becky says

I liked this book. It was easy to read and enjoyable, written by two sisters. The different perspectives at about the same time kept a flow going, though sometimes I wondered if they looked at what the other had written and thought, "Oh, that's good--I'll write that in my part, too." (Of course, they may just think alike because they are sisters.)

It was worth a read.

Alexis says

I was expecting more from this book, every indication said this would be a great read. Instead, it's a slow read, only getting really lyrical in the last 50 pages. Which isn't saying much, since it was almost 200 pages.. The read is interesting because it splits into two perspectives from both sisters, but I often felt that it was playing up situations, and not really learning from anything, or at least, not writing to the learning process, which felt cheap. Three stars felt like a lot.

Aja says

Not quite so funny as Sedaris nor so haunting a biography as say Fun Home. There were some truly amazing parts on both ends but not enough consistency to make me truly love it.

Shannon says

I would have given this book 2.5stars...but, oh well.

This book, though I had high hopes for it, was just an ehh for me. The beginning was lame (do parents really let their kids act like that?) and the end was way too sappy and convenient to be real. The middle parts were the best...but the book was unsequential in its advancement...and that was confusing and annoying. Unless

you had a heinous relationship with your sister growing up...I would pass.

Robin says

A memoir of two sisters growing up in rural Wisconsin during the 70's. I give a lot of credit and kudos to anyone that can open up their lives to scrutiny. The book fell flat for me though. The writing was uninspired and dragged at times, though there was potential with some of the situations. I guess that is the risk you run with memoirs. The authors try to run accurate to history, but embellishments could have made the story much more enjoyable.

AJ LeBlanc says

This book should have been a big hit for me.

1. It's a memoir. I like memoir.
2. It's about sisters. I have a sister.
3. The sisters grew up around the same time I grew up. I like relating.

However, it fell flat.

I wanted to like it. I liked the structure. The chapters switch back and forth between the two sisters and start off with the age they were when the moment happened. You often see the same event from both points of view, which is great because of the four year age difference. This worked well when the two were dealing with their mother's miscarriage.

Except for that one section though, I found myself not really caring.

I think it was the written voice of the sisters. It felt like they were dictating the basic elements to someone else and not exploring the emotions behind everything. It felt like adults trying to remember how a teenager would feel and then trying to wrap that around their current version. There were a few horrible moments and I thought to myself "I should be really upset about this, but I'm not." I was upset that I didn't feel upset.

Even when they did get into emotions, it felt too much like telling and not showing. There were a few moments that felt real and captured what had happened. Unfortunately these made other moments feel even more flat because they didn't hold up. The potential was there but the follow through wasn't.

I did relate to much of the story. My sister is six years older than I am, so I responded to Natalie's reactions to Shannon. However, their family dynamics are nothing like mine and my sister's. However, there were some universal threads in there so the book wasn't a total loss.

Karen says

It took me a while to review this one - had to stew on it for a while. It really touched me more than I thought it would. In alternating chapters, Shannon and Natalie tell what it was like growing up with a vastly different sister. The first few chapter were just what I expected - funny anecdotes of jealous little girls. The later chapters were really touching, though. They showed that none of us fall into perfect stereotypes. I really

related to how hard it was for Natalie to relate to all Shannon was going through - as someone with a sister 7 years older and one 7 years younger, I know it's difficult to understand one another when you are at such different points in your life. I was a little disappointed in the lack of mention of the younger brother. I know the book is about the sisters, but he shouldn't have been written off as a non-entity just because he was so much younger. I also thought the last "Barbie" scene was a little contrived - it seemed manufactured for the book. When I first started reading it, I just knew I would be able to peg my sisters and me as the "salty sister" or the "sweet sister." But after reading, it's obvious that in this book, just as in real life, the sisters didn't stick to playing their pre-ordained parts.

Tara says

I really LOVED this book. It is a great story of two sisters. I saw a lot of similarities in Natalie and Shannon and myself and my sister, Sarah.

I loved that it took place in Wisconsin. It had references of Fleet Farm and Hardee's. I am right between the Natalie and Shannon in age and could totally relate to them liking Duran Duran, reading Sweet Valley High books, rolling their jeans, and curling their bangs.

There was even a reference to a parent in Prentice and her rival "Tara" who by reference of her mom as a hair dresser, I think my dad is friends with Tara's dad. I'm looking into that.

Cmariewt says

I couldn't get past the part where the grandma punches a half blind poodle in the throat so hard it flies across the room, for brushing against her pant leg That could have been left out for sure. With such a casual mention of a thing like that I don't even want to read any further.

katie says

Some chapters were great, some were meh. It's very honest and unflinching, but I was still having trouble seeing how they overcame their differences.
