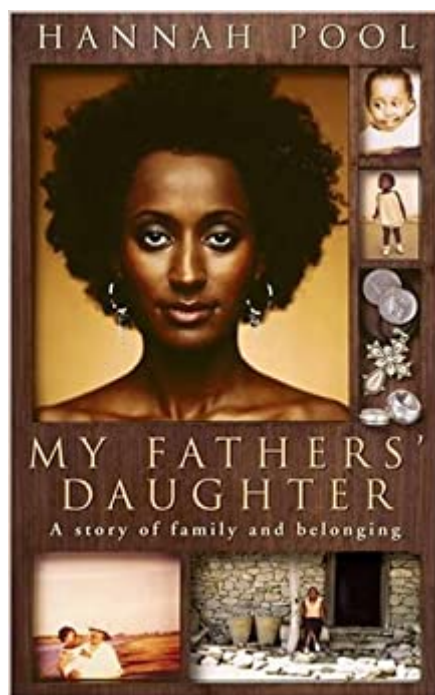


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My Fathers' Daughter



Synopsis

Hannah Pool was adopted from an orphanage in Eritrea in 1974 and came to England, via Sudan and Norway, with her white adoptive father six years later. Then a brother she never suspected she had wrote to her from Eritrea. But Hannah hid the letter away, and it is only now ten years after receiving it that she has decided to track down her surviving Eritrean family. Hannah Pool's search for her birth family is a journey which takes her far beyond her comfort zone and face to face with the harsh realities of a life that could so easily have been her own. Frank, intimate, funny and sometimes all too real, MY FATHERS' DAUGHTER is the story of one life, two families and two very different cultures.

Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Hamish Hamilton Ltd (July 28, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0241142601

ISBN-13: 978-0241142608

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 1 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.9 ounces

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,909,919 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 inÂ Books > Travel > Africa > Eritrea #7816 inÂ Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Writing > Travel #14074 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers

Customer Reviews

"[A] truly moving exploration of identity." -- "Sunday Times"

Hannah Pool, best known for her 'New Black' column in Guardian Weekend, is a writer and commissioning editor for the Guardian. This is her first book.

My 60 year old mother was adopted at birth. To this day she sometimes feels that if her own parents didn't want her, why would anyone else. She too met her birth parents. Some of the feelings shared by the author of My Father's Daughter are similar to those expressed by mother. The book helped me understand my mother better. I also enjoyed reading about the culture of the small African country and the similarities and difference between it and those of the US.

This is a great read for anyone. I strongly recommend it.

good content great writing.

Hannah Pool, a journalist for a British newspaper, was born in a small Eritrean town called Keren in 1974. Placed in an orphanage in Asmara, Eritrea's capital, shortly after her birth she grew up believing her mother had died in childbirth with her father dying shortly afterwards. When she was roughly six months old, malnourished and suffering from chicken pox, she was adopted by David Pool, a British academic, and his American wife, Marya. At the time, David was teaching at the University of Khartoum and Marya was doing voluntary work with some nuns. Marya died when Hannah was four and briefly went to stay with some friends in Norway before moving back to England with her dad. By the time she was twenty, David was lecturing at Manchester University, with Eritrean politics among his areas of expertise. When Eritrea won its independence from Ethiopia in the early 1990s, the guerrilla fighters he'd got to know in the 1970s had become government ministers. David was among the people invited over for the celebrations and, on impulse, went looking for the orphanage in Asmara. Not only was it still standing, it was still being run by the same nun - Sister Gabriela - who'd arranged Hannah's adoption. Several months after David's return home came the bombshell : a priest David had spoken to at the orphanage wrote a letter with the news that not only was Hannah's biological father still alive, she also had at least one older brother. "My Fathers' Daughter" tells the story of Hannah's trip back to Eritrea to meet her 'natural' family for the first time. This is a very easily read book, though it can't have been a very easy one to write. Hannah doesn't spare herself - her doubts, panics, frustrations and the occasional bout of confusion are all covered. The fact that much of the book is written in the present tense, in nearly a conversational tone, really helped put those feelings across. At times, it felt like I was intruding on something a little too personal - like someone else's diary, I was unsure I 'should' be reading parts of it. At the same time, however, it almost felt like the book finished too soon. The epilogue, looking back over the year after she returned home, could nearly have been worth a book itself. Very highly recommended.

One of the things I enjoy most about getting together with other adoptive families is swapping adoption stories. Frequently I tear up as I hear other's stories, and I love telling the story of my family's adoption of Zippy. I don't hear as many stories about meeting birth families. One of our

friends took their daughter to Haiti a few months ago to meet her birth family. We had a sweet time with Zippy's birth mother in June. My Fathers' Daughter tells the story of Hannah Pool's reunion with her birth family. She provides a valuable resource for adoptive families, particularly those who adopt internationally or transracially, who wonder about the whirlwind of emotional issues in such a reunion. Ms. Pool, a writer for The Guardian, was born in Eritrea. Her mother died in childbirth, and her father placed her in an orphanage. The orphanage had record that both parents had died, and placed Hannah as a baby with a white couple who was then living in Eritrea. A short time later, they moved back to Europe, and Hannah grew up in England. In My Fathers' Daughter (note the placement of the apostrophe--a significant detail that is easy to miss), Pool recounts the story of discovering that her father was, in fact, still living, and her subsequent trip to Eritrea to meet the family of her birth. There is much to love in her story. A professional journalist, Pool tells a wonderful story, providing details and background that draw in the reader. And what a rich story she tells. She skillfully and beautifully conveys her feelings upon learning that her birth father is alive, upon meeting him and other family members, upon seeing the bed on which she was born and her mother died, and more. After a lifetime of feeling disconnected from her home country and birth family, she finally connects and feels a sense of belonging. In one moving passage, Pool anticipates meeting her birth father and Eritrean relatives for the first time, after a lifetime of being around no one related to her by birth. It's about "being able to look in a mirror and know you have your father's eyes and your mother's lips," about knowing medical history, looking at nieces and nephews and wondering what your own children will look like, knowing if you will likely be fat, thin, tall, short. (99-100) Every adoptee must have the same kind of questions at one time or another. I am reminded of a time when (my very white wife) Kelly and (my African-American son) Zippy were cheek to cheek, looking in the mirror. Kelly asked Zippy if he thought they looked alike. Without missing a beat he said yes, the whites of their eyes are the same! One of Pool's most pressing questions for her Eritrean family is why they placed her in the orphanage. Her feelings of rejection run deep. For "normal" families, "the thing that remains the same is the sense of belonging, that families are permanent. The almost invisible confidence that comes from knowing no matter what happens, your parents will always be your parents. No matter how often your adoptive family tells you they love you, no matter how much you believe them, for the adoptee there is always the knowledge that a parent can decide they don't want you anymore, sign a few forms, and wash their hands of you. . . . It's tattooed on your psyche: love is temporary." (88) This passage rips at my heart. Pool doesn't say much about her adoptive family, but what she does say is very positive. She worries that they will feel betrayed by her tracing her birth family, but they support her at every step.

I don't see a justification for her insecurity about their love for her. I hope and pray that as Zippy grows, he will always know that there is nothing temporary about our love for him. I hope it's tattooed on his psyche that Kelly and Chloe and Elliot and I and all of our extended family love him unconditionally. Pool goes on to say that most adoptees wish they were never adopted. "Even though I know more [adoptees] than most, I have never heard the words, 'I'm glad I was adopted.' . . . We all wish we hadn't been put up for adoption." In Pool's case, she knows that in Eritrea she would have faced hunger, drought, displacement due to war, likely early death, and if not, then national service at the front lines, possible genital mutilation, an arranged marriage, and children in her teens. "But . . . I still wish I had never been adopted." (102-103) Later, while visiting family in the rural village where her father lives, she confesses that she envies her nieces. "[T]hey have something I have never had. They are slap bang in the middle of a normal, happy Eritrean childhood. . . . I am jealous of their few uncertainties." (220) Despite their poverty, Pool longs to be a part of their life, to share their lifestyle. Maybe Zippy will look at his birth family's life one day and think the same things. Maybe all adoptees think such things. But I believe and hope with all my heart that he will say "I'm glad I was adopted!" I can't help but think that Pool would feel differently about adoption and the course of her life if she had a foundation of faith. She wears her atheism on her sleeve. For instance, upon learning that her father was really alive, she feels a deep sense of gratitude without an object. "It's times like these when it would be handy to have a religion. If I believed in a god, I'd have someone to thank, and it's be nice to have someone to thank. As it is I'll have to settle for my own version: my father is alive, thank f--- for that." (24) Later, upon meeting her extended family, they all thank God for her coming. She does not quite know how to respond to all this religious sentiment. "I want to say Lufthansa brought me here, not God, and if he was so great, then why did God separate us in the first place? . . . I want to say that God is a load of baloney . . . and that anyone who thanks him for anything is a fool. I want to say that I came here, me, on my own, without help from a divine being. . . . I want to say God didn't take me away, you gave me up." (112) A couple of other notes, not so related to adoption. Pool, an African woman who grew up in a white family in a majority white culture, has some interesting insights into race and feminism. The first time she heads out on the street in Asmara, the Eritrean capital, the attitude of the people surprises her. "Everyone looks so comfortable, so relaxed, walking around as if they own the place. So this is what black people look like when they are not having to constantly look over their shoulder, or justify their presence." (63) She relishes the times when people take her for a native Eritrean, not standing out the way she does at home at London. Those of us white families who have adopted children of other races should bear in mind the potential alienation and isolation they

might feel in majority white culture. Her experience here reminds us that spending time among people of his or her own race can provide a huge boost in confidence and acceptance of his or her identity. Upon returning home, the disparity of wealth between the first and third worlds bothers Pool, just as it does many Westerners who visit developing countries. Only with her, it is much more personal. "It is one thing to spend a fortune on shoes and bags without a second thought; it is quite another to do so when you know your sister and her family would not survive without food aid. I found it hard enough to read or see reports of drought, potential famine, and possible war before I went to Eritrea, so what will it be like now that I can put names and faces to the statistics?"

(265) Despite some of the negative comments about adoption and Pool's blatant atheism (and the self-centered, materialistic, libertine attitudes that result), *My Fathers' Daughter* gives wonderful insight into the struggles, questions, and insecurities of the international and/or transracial adoptee. Her colorful storytelling, honest emotional revelations, and probing self-reflection make this a highly recommended read.

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