

Blue-Eyed Son – The Story of an Adoption by Nicky Campbell
(Pan Books, 2005)

The author is a radio and television personality in the United Kingdom. As a resident of Australia, however, I had never heard of him before reading his book. Campbell tells his story of growing up as an adopted child in Edinburgh and of his search, as an adult, for his blood relatives. I found the book difficult to read on several levels. Campbell may have attended an expensive private school, but they clearly did not teach him to write in sentences. Sadly, they also did not teach him how to spell and he has not even mastered the use of the spell-checker. If he paid someone to edit his book, then I believe that he is entitled to a refund. If he didn't, then it suggests that he has a misplaced faith in his own abilities. In books about adoption there is always the potential for confusion between the natural family and the adoptive family. Campbell's book would have been easier to read if there had been more clarity around the use of the terms describing family relationships. On a positive note, his book certainly appears to be very honest and it is heartening to read a book written by a man who is able to describe his feelings so articulately. However, I frequently cringed at his lack of understanding of the dynamics of adoption separation and reunion. Sadly, in his ignorance, he perpetuates unhelpful adoption myths.

Many times I wanted to put the book down and read no more, but, as an author, I know how frustrating it is when readers pass judgment on my books without reading them in their entirety and so I soldiered on. Although I experienced many frustrations while reading "Blue-Eyed Son", I have to admit that I enjoyed his references to Edinburgh which he describes as "...a place that never leaves your heart. If you've got one". I also lived in Edinburgh and, like Stella, Campbell's natural mother, my first child was born and adopted there.

I found it distressing to read that Campbell feels that, had he not been adopted, but instead raised among his original family members, his life would have been 'ruined'. Of course, no one could possibly know how his life might have been, had the adoption not taken place. He may well have enjoyed a happy and fulfilled life, full of love, encouragement and acceptance far away from the self-absorbed, materialistic snobbery of "the Edinburgh middle-class mafia" which he describes. He also could have avoided in his own life the issues faced by many who are adopted, which he illustrates so clearly, such as insecurity, identity confusion, need for approval and fear of rejection and abandonment.

The men in "Blue-Eyed Son" are generally described vividly and with admiration. The women in Campbell's life receive less attention. Of his half-sister, Esther, he says, in Chapter 21, "I'd treated her like a staging post on my journey that was now miles behind me. She didn't deserve that." Sadly, he appears to have treated his natural mother, Stella, in the same manner, without, however, acknowledging his behaviour towards her and addressing it. Of his natural father, Joseph, he says, at the end of Chapter 19, "I have no right to judge him. Just a duty to understand. He is my father." I was saddened throughout the book to find that he did not seem to accord the same courtesy to his mother. While he writes at length and with passion about Joseph, his references to Stella are generally cursory and lacking in affection.

Adoption is based on fabrication and denial. The adopted child is issued with a second birth certificate, which allows the pretence that he or she is actually the child of the adopters. Campbell seems to have spent a large part of his life perpetuating this fabrication and denial, as he concealed the fact that he had contacted his relatives from members of his adoptive family, assuming that they would not share his joy and excitement. In recent years he seems to have reached some understanding of the fact that natural family members and adoptive family members each have their place in his life, however and that there is no need for them to compete. I believe that if he had prepared himself more appropriately for the contact with his relatives, the experience could have been less harrowing and more satisfying for all involved.

Any book about adoption is useful in educating the community. However, more knowledge and insight coupled with better editing would have made this book not only more enjoyable to read, but also more enlightening to its readers.

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