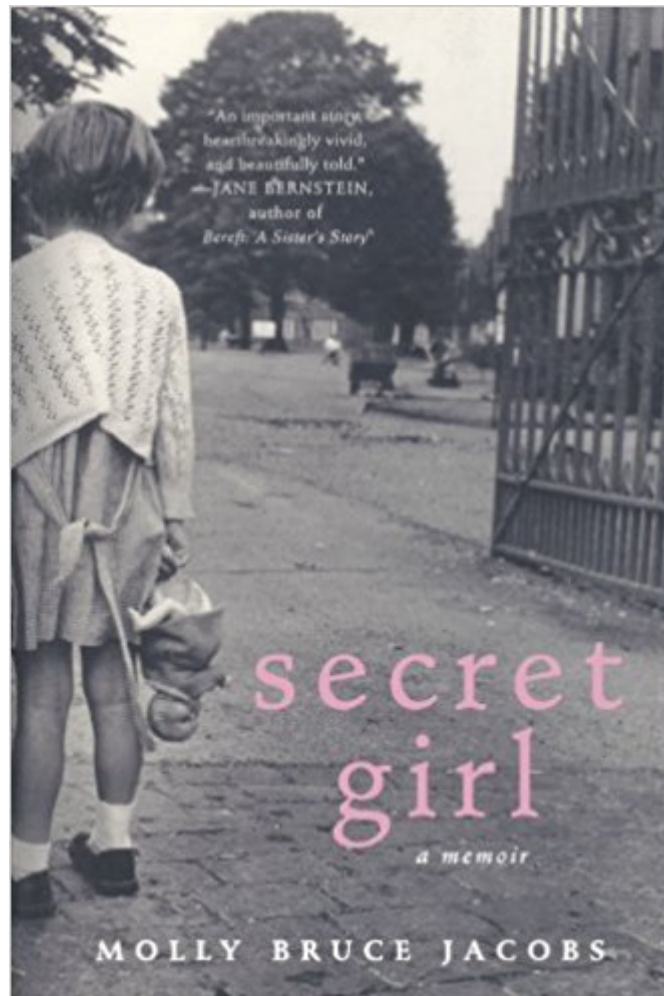




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# Secret Girl: A Memoir



## Synopsis

For decades, a well-to-do Baltimore family guarded a secret they felt too ashamed to reveal, much less speak of among themselves. For one daughter, that secret would haunt her for years but ultimately compel her to take surprising risks and reap unbelievable rewards—the story of which forms the stunning narrative of this remarkable memoir. When Molly Bruce Jacobs, the family's eldest daughter, finds herself newly sober at the age of thirty-eight, she finally seeks out and comes face-to-face with this secret: Anne, a younger sister who was diagnosed at birth with hydrocephalus ("water on the brain") and mental retardation, was institutionalized. Anne has never been home to visit, and Molly Jacobs has never seen her. Full of trepidation, she goes to meet her sister for the first time. As the book unfolds and the sisters grow close, Jacobs learns of the decades of life not shared and gains surprising insights about herself, including why she drank for most of her adult life. In addition, she gradually comes to understand that her parents' reasons for placing Anne in a state institution were far more complex than she'd ever imagined.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A former Baltimore lawyer writes poignantly of her life-altering decision to meet her retarded sister for the first time. Although she'd known about her younger sister since she was 13, Jacobs never met Anne (incarcerated for most of her life in a state hospital) until the two were in their 30s. Born a twin in 1957 and afflicted with hydrocephalus ("water on the brain"), Anne was instantly hidden away in a private nursing home by her wealthy, status-conscious parents, who worried about the retarded child's effect on her twin, and also on her older sister, Molly (called Brucie). Although Anne's

condition stabilized, the parents still refused to bring her home or visit her. Hoping to redirect her own life after derailment by alcoholism and divorce, author Jacobs, the mother of two sons, explores the factors that persuaded her to finally meet Anne in the early 1990s. Throughout the memoir, Jacobs faces the painful, cruel evidence of her family's neglect and denial. Knowing Anne revives for Jacobs a youthful enthusiasm and spontaneity. Anne becomes for the author her "vital counterpart": "She had what the world I grew up in had suppressed in me." Painful secrets are brought to light in this rueful, honest account. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Imagine being 13 years old and discovering you have a younger sister secreted away in a mental institution. For Jacobs, the implications of her family's utter rejection of this sibling, diagnosed with hydrocephalus and labeled mentally retarded at birth, are not fully revealed until she reaches adulthood and survives her own battles with alcoholism and an unsuccessful marriage. When she finally deems herself ready to come face-to-face with the sister she's never seen, Jacobs unearths a shocking portrait of abandonment and denial, exposing parents who were woefully ill equipped to handle imperfection in either of their daughters. For her part, Jacobs admits to being a conflicted sibling. As a child, she accepted her parents' draconian decree that Anne be denied access to even minimal family contact. As an adult, a guilt-driven Jacobs tries to compensate for those years of neglect by integrating Anne into her own unsettled lifestyle. With disarming candor, Jacobs creates a graphic account of one family's physical loss and one woman's emotional gain. Carol Haggas Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Brutally honest and thought provoking. Jacobs writes from the heart, and I admire her for her courage on a subject that seems unimaginable in today's world.

As the mother of a child with hydrocephalus I cried so much reading this book. It is an amazing story of family, and how things were handled when disabled children were hidden away. This story made me thankful that my daughter was born in a time when we weren't given much hope but we were encouraged to bring her home and love her.

One of the best books I have ever read!!

This book was on a list of "to read" for my daughter's college class. She's not an avid reader like her mama, but really enjoyed this book. It was exactly as described and the seller was a pleasure to work with. They did what they said and the price was excellent. Thanks

Molly Bruce Jacobs is a former Baltimore attorney who was raised in an upper middle class home. She is also a divorcee and recovering alcoholic. This story is about discovering at the age of 13 that her younger sister Anne was institutionalized and hidden away. Maybe Anne is the lucky one because Molly was raised in the family home under the often disapproving eyes of her parents and this has given way over the years to many problems for Molly. It isn't until her marriage has fallen apart and Molly has started on the road to abstinence that she feels compelled to seek out Anne. Diagnosed at birth as being hydrocephalic and retarded, Anne in many ways is blessed with a simplicity and freedom that evades Molly. In coming to know Anne, Molly comes to some realizations about her family and discovers that nothing is all that simple or obvious. This isn't a bad story. In many ways I found it interesting though not necessarily unusual given some people's attitudes toward birth defects and their inability to cope or adapt. What essentially is extracted from Molly's account is that all the family members were self-centered and collectively dysfunctional. While Molly revels in this new found relationship on some levels and points in time, there are gaps in time where she seemingly disappears from Anne's life. There are the inevitable men coming and going from Molly's life and enough that isn't stated or explained that this story seemed incomplete at best with too many loose ends dangling. In the end, I felt Molly's commitment to Anne was when it was convenient for her. Bottom line: the premise of this book is 5\*, but the reality is between 3 to 4\* tops.

This should have been a much better book. It is not often that one hears about the routine practice of whisking less-than-perfect children away for lives in institutions that was prevalent in the 50's and 60's. The author's sister, Anne is one of those children, sent away at birth because of hydrocephalus, or water on the brain, that the doctors predicted would cause an early death. Anne survives, though mentally challenged. The author decides to meet Anne twenty-some years after learning of her existence. I read this book to its end, even though I got impatient with jerky chronology and much too much detail about the author's life. The beginning was not promising, since the first chapter sets up a first meeting with the sister, Anne, in great detail, then - nothing. The author decides to engage in seemingly random flashbacks. When the first meeting is finally

described, the reader has almost forgotten the setup. I appreciate the book for outlining the cultural mindset of the time and for the details given from Anne's medical records. Her descriptions of adjusting to Anne's sometimes quirky behavior is generally honest and unflinching. However, the author, whether she knows it or not, engages in much the same behavior as her parents. Like her parents, she passively-aggressively criticizes the people who care for Anne on a day-to-day basis, ignoring the basic fact that these caretakers were far more reliable and caring to Anne than any member of the family. At one point Jacobs is horrified that her parents nixed a trip to Disneyland for Anne, arranged by the institution where they abandoned her, but herself discourages a vacation trip for Anne near the end of the book, thinking that the location was inappropriate. However, she suggests no alternative. In the end, the author fails to fully integrate Anne into her life, and, despite her efforts to put a positive spin on her efforts, she never really connects with Anne, but credit must be given to her for trying.

This is the story of Bruce and her family, her life growing up wealthy near Baltimore with her parents and younger sister, Laura. When the family is around the table one day, their father suddenly announces that they have another sister, Laura's twin, Anne. Anne was born with hydrocephalus and is mentally retarded. In the 1950s, the doctors believed she would not live long, and her parents had no desire to bring a mentally retarded daughter into their "normal" family, so Anne is institutionalized and has next to no contact with family members. This book tells the story of the three sisters- Bruce remembers for herself and for Laura, and tries to reconnect with her sister as an adult. Quote: "My parents, I realized, did not welcome any reminders of Anne's existence . . . it carried a message they didn't want to hear: Your daughter's alive, she's growing older, and we'd like you to become more involved in her life." This is a nice short book with several interesting stories, including what it was like when many well-to-do family immediately institutionalized "abnormal" children- giving them the physical care they needed without allowing them to be part of the family, to keep them from marring a "perfect" life. Additionally, Jacobs does an excellent job of seeing the parallels between herself and Anne. Bruce ends up also not fitting the model of the "perfect" daughter her parents want, and in many ways they reject her attempts to be herself as much as they rejected Anne.

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