



Hilary and Jackie

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From the moment Jacqueline du Pré first held a cello at the age of five, it was clear she had an extraordinary gift. At sixteen, when she made her professional debut, she was hailed as one of the world's most talented and exciting musicians. But ten years later, she stopped playing virtually overnight, when multiple sclerosis removed the feeling in her hands just before a concert. It took fourteen more years for the crippling disease to take its final toll.

In this uniquely revealing biography, Hilary and Piers du Pré have re-created the life they shared with their sister in astonishing personal detail, unveiling the private world behind the public face. With warmth and candor they recount Jackie's blissful love of the cello, her marriage to the conductor Daniel Barenboim, her compulsions, her suffering, and, above all, the price exacted by her talent on the whole family. For proud as they were of Jackie's enormous success, none of them was prepared for the profound impact her genius would have on each of their lives. . . .

Hilary and Jackie Details

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Karschtl says

Die Geschichte der britischen Star-Cellistin Jacqueline Du Pré, die bereits in jungen Jahren mit ihrem unglaublichen Talent das Publikum verzückte und mit 22 ein ebensolches Musik-Wunderkind - Daniel Barenboim - heiratete, mit dem sie viele Konzerte gab. Bereits im Alter von 28 Jahren wird bei ihr Multiple Sklerose diagnostiziert, woran sie 1987 42jährig stirbt.

Ich hatte von Jacqueline du Pré vorher noch niemals gehört, bin allerdings auch kein Fan und vor allem Kenner der (modernen) klassischen Musikerwelt. Barenboim hingegen war mir zumindest ein Begriff. Ich kaufte das Buch damals wohl eher, weil ich schon mal vom Film gehört hatte - gesehen habe ich ihn allerdings auch nicht. Und wußte auch absolut nichts von der Geschichte (Wunderkind, Schwestern, Krankheit, wahre Geschichte...) bevor ich zu lesen begann.

Gerade der erste Teil des Buches war recht langatmig, wieder und wieder wurde von verschiedenen Konzertauftritten berichtet und wie grandios Jackie spielte. Das langweilt nach einiger Zeit, obwohl die Autoren versuchten die einzelnen Auftritte durch kleine Anekdoten 'greifbarer' zu gestalten. Dennoch...ich musste mich durchkämpfen.

Interessanter wurde immerhin die Geschichte, als Jackie den Mann ihrer Schwester für sich beansprucht - zum aussprechen, zum ausheulen und auch zum austoben im Bett. Hilary ist zwar verletzt, ist aber einverstanden mit dieser Affäre, weil sie alles tun würde um der arg depressiven Jackie zu helfen. Ihr Mann beteuert ebenfalls, es nur zu tun damit es Jackie irgendwann wieder besser geht. Ich habe zum einen nicht recht verstanden wieso Jackie so stark depressiv war (sie war erschöpft von den Reisen durch die Welt mit ihrem ebenso prominenten Mann, und in der Ehe stand es zu dem Zeitpunkt wohl nicht zum besten - aber mir erschien das nicht Grund genug zu sein um ihre monatelange schlechte Verfassung wirklich zu erklären). Ebenso unbegreiflich finde ich das Verhalten von Hilary und ihrem Mann. Normal ist das jedenfalls nicht, denke ich mir. Anfang der 70er wurde bei Jackie dann Multiple Sklerose diagnostiziert, sie konnte kaum mehr auf ihrem geliebten Cello spielen und erst recht nicht mehr öffentlich damit auftreten. 14 Jahre später starb sie - im Grunde war es dann schon eine Erlösung.

In den überwiegenden Passagen des Buches, die abwechselnd von ihrer Schwester Hilary und ihrem Bruder Piers erzählt werden, fand ich Jackie unsympathisch bis extrem unsympathisch. Sie ist verwöhnt (die komplette Familie kümmert sich in erster Linie nur um sie und ihre Bedürfnisse), auch eingebildet, sehr fordernd, arrogant, egoistisch und teilweise rücksichtslos. Als ihr Vater schwer erkrankt, als sie selbst auch schon mit MS diagnostiziert wurde, interessiert sie das kein bißchen - sie möchte nichts davon wissen, weil es ihr zu viel ist, über einen kranken Vater nachzudenken. Nur manchmal im Kontakt mit ihren Nichten und Neffen kam sie herzlich rüber.

Bewunderwert ist eigentlich, dass ihre beiden Geschwister - die mehrmals betonen wie sehr sie Jackie liebten - sich in diesem Buch nicht scheuen auch deren schlechtere Seite zu zeigen. Besonders Hilary schreibt an verschiedenen Stellen, dass Jackie ihr sehr weh getan hat durch ihre Affäre mit ihrem Mann oder auch durch ihre starke Boshaftigkeiten in einem späteren Stadium ihrer Krankheit. Eben wegen dieser offenen, in einigen Passagen sicher auch sehr privaten Biografie, ist das Buch dann doch wieder lesenswert.

Nun kenne ich Du Prés Musik nicht, vielleicht macht die all ihre schlechten Eigenschaften wieder wett. Falls sie mir mal musikalisch über den Weg läuft, werde ich sicher genau hinhören.

Kricket says

i borrowed this book from my dad for my flight home. i grew up with jacqueline du pre playing the elgar cello concerto on our stereo but didn't know anything about her rather tragic life. i was also intrigued that my father, who normally reads extremely dry nonfiction about mozart, rare birds, or sailing vessels would pick up something that looked so steamy.

the best word i can come up with to summarize "hilary and jackie" is bizarre. originally titled "a genius in the family," it documents the life of du pre according to her older sister, hilary and younger brother, piers. it was repackaged for the film adaptation to include the tagline: "The True Story of Two Sisters Who Shared a Passion, a Madness and a Man" which isn't QUITE accurate. while they were certainly both nutty, it's not the same kind of nutty.

the two juiciest things about the story are 1) the tragic early end of jackie's career due to multiple sclerosis and 2) the fact that she slept with hilary's husband and hilary claims to be ok with that.

item number 2 was the part that made me do a double take. hilary wakes up in the middle of the night to find that jackie has crawled in bed with her and her husband, christopher "kiffer" finzi, and is groping him under the covers. later jackie & kiffer start making sexy times together. at this point jackie is an emotional mess, having problems with her own husband (daniel barenboim) so hilary...decides to just not do anything?! and kiffer is like "i'm doing this to help your sister, hil. i have to do this to help her." so hilary doesn't say anything to jackie and doesn't object to kif hopping in bed with jackie on a regular basis. jackie continues to live in their home and be BFFs with hilary.

wait, what?

according to hilary & kiffer's daughter, clare, hilary is totally delusional. clare claims that her dad was a serial adulterer who later had two kids with some other lady and hilary chose to believe that kif slept with jackie to be noble because she couldn't face the truth. this is the story i am more inclined to believe.

another option is that hilary is INSANELY jealous of jackie but doesn't want to own up to it. she does admit to being jealous of jackie's musical talent when they were younger- hilary didn't get as far with her flute. and i noticed that almost all of the photos selected for the insert in the book are extremely unflattering to jackie. so that's a telling detail.

toward the end of the memoir, piers finds jesus, which is kind of a hilarious little side note. it leads to an extremely ill jackie receiving an anonymous bible in the mail and becoming infuriated with piers.

one thing to note is that reading this was a lot more interesting than some biographies which are over-the-top worshipful. it was sort of refreshing to see the darkness and problems in the life of such a celebrated musician.

Rebecca says

My idol. A sister's misguided attempt to malign genius.

Gotta love that Elgar cello concerto - basically a love song to a vanished world.

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=L5C99JyP2ns>

Jeana says

A couple years ago, I stumbled upon a black-and-white video of Jacqueline du Pre playing Elgar's Cello Concerto and I couldn't get enough. It brought tears to my eyes, the emotion in the music was so real. This is the story of Jacqueline du Pre told by her older sister Hilary (a piano and flute player) and little brother Piers (a pilot).

I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the childhood and how Jacqueline got her first cello and what she played and how she played. I was interested in how her sister Hilary dealt with her sister's gift, even though she herself had a gift. Even from the time she was a little girl, though, Jackie always got her way. Because she was special, her mother gave her everything. She lived her whole life not having to hear no from anyone, especially her family. She was selfish and spoiled and I swear I just wanted one of them to stand up to her, despite her gift.

The most horrifying part of her life, though, is after she gets depressed and goes to live with Hilary and Kiffer and somehow ends up taking Hilary's husband. It was all so odd and just not okay. I don't care if they blame the MS for her irrational behavior; that was just too much. I had a hard time feeling bad for Jacqueline as she grew increasingly ill. I couldn't get over how selfish she was and how everyone tried to make her happy but she did so little to return the love. One of the most heartbreak for me to read about was the way she treated her mother--for months and months, she wouldn't even talk to her. And there never was a reason why. And after all that her mother had done for her as a child and as an adult (don't get me started on laundering her clothes into her thirties and across continents!).

Unfortunately, I'm not sure I'll be able to appreciate du Pre's Elgar like I used to. I guess sometimes it's better not to know.

Anna Gaffey says

Wow. This is definitely an intimate biography. Hilary and Piers Du Pre describe their sister's life as they remember it: a mix of music and personal so detailed that it has been called exploitative and insulting. (I did feel a bit voyeuristic while reading in the airport! But then, I was crying openly by the end, and that was more embarrassing for me.)

This is a biography of Jacqueline Du Pre, the English cellist. Told from her siblings' perspectives, Jackie is a child prodigy who grows up to earn great acclaim in the musical arena. The book showcases her playing, and also her struggles with depression, relationships and finally, her fatal battle with multiple sclerosis.

The main "scandal" of the book is Jackie's agreement with her sister Hilary (also a celebrated musician) and Hilary's husband Christopher, or "Kiffer." It is unclear whether "Kiffer" was truly interested in helping his sister-in-law or was taking advantage of her depression, but the affair between them was with Hilary's consent. Her contributions to the book are more emotional than Piers', as she seems to have been closer to Jackie.

Piers' excerpts I found to be quite self-centered and more exploratory of his own life, rather than Jackie's. Late in the book he is converted to Christianity (from...Christianity? I wasn't sure, but I thought it was a conversion from non-practicing Anglican to Born-Again, as Americans know the phrase) and details how it affected his relationship with Jackie. In his writing/memories, Piers comes across as lost in the swirl of accolades around his sisters and their musical abilities.

Behavior of a Scandalous Nature and Possible Sibling Jealousy aside, this is a very involving read. Jackie is a doomed genius. Her struggles to continue after her MS diagnosis are as heartbreakingly as her earlier mental and relationship problems. It was a hard book to finish.

If you've listened to any Jacqueline Du Pre recordings, I would recommend reading this. Then again, maybe I wouldn't.

Primrosebarks says

"As Jackie's talent became more evident, the balance of our family life altered and we felt compelled to nurture both her and her colossal gift. Following Mum's lead, we all supported Jackie and watched as she shone in the spotlight. She became the centre of our attention and was automatically and without question put first." (p.400)

This paragraph is a great summary of this book. Was it healthy? Did the other children and husband suffer from being ignored? Hilary and Piers du Pre offer a frank, heartfelt description of a loving family life, and offer a glimpse of the enigmatic, awkward, engaging brilliance that was Jacqueline du Pre. Yes, Jackie's mother's obsession with her daughter hurt her husband and other two children. Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvPza...> to understand why.

MS diagnosed in young people carry a 40-50% chance of accompanying dementia, often characterized by an inability to control emotions. It is likely that Jackie suffered from this, and her kind-hearted sister and her husband tried to "help" her---which ultimately failed to do any good at all. Loved ones want to help so badly, to the point of sacrificing family relationships and even one's own safety. I get it. For those who don't, I hope you'll never have to undergo the hell of watching a loved one suffer like this.

I loved the first half of this book. The descriptions of family life, music, and this brilliant artist were engaging and eloquent. I cried throughout the last half. While "Jackie and Hilary" the movie vilified Mr. Barenboim, Hilary Finzi (nee Du Pre) was brilliant in expressing her understanding of what he had to endure, and how he was an unfailing support during Jackie's horrific last years.

This book is a loving tribute to an amazing artist and a beloved family member, whose life was cut short by a devastating disease. I loved it.

Miriam says

As much as this book recounts the life of Jacqueline Du Pre, it also details the family system that nurtured both the woman and her talent so that her music could be shared with the world. At times, humorous, at

times tragic, and at times overwhelming in its honesty, Jackie's siblings invite us to become temporary members of a loving family whose members were willing to make hard sacrifices to support the "Genius in the Family."

Janna says

I have given three stars because I love Jackie and couldn't put the book down, but so much of this seems odd to me. I hear a venom in her sister's writing that makes me think of trouble I had with my own sister. I wonder what Jackie would have to say? I have doubts about the validity of the story and the spirit in which it was written.

Dan Smith says

I found this book truly fascinating. I was a huge fan of the film Hilary and Jackie and I shared it with both my mom and my eldest sister (both musicians) and they both loved it (my sister usually doesn't like films I recommend to her). I tried to find the book that inspired it at the local library and was VERY disappointed to find that the city of Salt Lake does not consider it a worthy member of their collection. My sister ended up buying the paperback edition off of Alibris and we all ended up reading it.

Artistically, it is NOT a 5 star book. It is written in with two personal points of view; that of Hilary, Jackie's older sister and her younger brother, Piers. Hilary, also a gifted musician, details the highly intuitive musical training that the two girls received from their mother, also a very gifted musician, and each of the sister's subsequent battles with their music; Hilary's feelings of inadequacy that dogged her through her performance career and Jacqueline's love/hate relationship with her instrument and jealousy of her older sister's "normal" life as a wife and mother. This book is FILLED with drama. The brother's recollections were more round-about during his childhood years and really did not contribute much to the story. As he matured and married and Jacqueline's mental and physical health declined, his observations become much more pertinent.

As a film theorist, I was amazed while reading the book to see how the film makers translated some very "interior" action into a visual language that is told onscreen without words. They kept the 2 storyteller format of the book but remarkably changed it to the two different viewpoints and experiences of the sisters instead. Hilary's story is told first and we make many judgments of Jackie based on Hilary's interpretation of her actions. Later, when the story shifts to Jackie's experience, we see a very different picture of what it is to be a musical prodigy and be thrust into fame in the adult world while still really only a child. There is even one scene that is repeated almost word for word except for a couple of key words which completely alter the meaning from the first time we saw it. They did not make anything up, It all came from the book and that is amazing to me.

Bottom line; this is a fascinating book that was later adapted into one of those rare films that is BETTER than the book. See the film and read the book and see if you agree with me! The book is 'A Genius in the Family' and the film is 'Hilary and Jackie'.

PS- when neither actress won the academy awards they were nominated for, I gave up on watching or caring about the Oscars- it became so painfully obvious that the judges are not artists.

Caroline says

I picked this book up in a charity shop as a casual read, and by pure luck found it was well worth the pennies I paid for it.

It's a book about Jacqueline de Pré, the famous cellist, and it is written by her brother and sister. Each of them writes a chapter or a few pages, and then the book switches over to the other one, ie brother/sister/brother/sister and so on. I found the changeover virtually seamless, and it worked surprisingly well.

I liked it on three counts - firstly the way it describes what it is like to be a sibling in a family where one of the children is a genius, secondly the way it describes the dynamics of the du Pré family generally, and thirdly the way it describes very honestly the tragedy of the disease Jacqueline suffered from - multiple sclerosis.

In my family, my brother and sister and I are pretty equal in our achievements, and always have been. Not so the du Prés. Jacqueline soared above her brother and sister in talent and popularity, and her sister Hilary, also a musician, describes poignantly the distress of realising that her sister was hugely more successful and adored by their audiences than she was. It was not an easy thing for a young child to take on board. Also Jacqueline had an especially close relationship with her mother, and much of her mother's time was spent furthering Jacqueline's talents, and meeting the demands of her career. I thought in view of Hilary's position in the family, her love for her golden sister Jacqueline, and her attitude towards her, were in fact very generous. It was less of an issue for her brother Piers - probably because he was not a musician (and was determined to steer well clear of being one.) In spite of their differences, they were a close and supportive family, and this was a powerful and endearing thread throughout the book.

The description of Jacqueline's illness touched me on a personal level. I am involved with caring for a family member with Alzheimer's. I have read a couple of books about this, but I identified more with the ravages of a destructive illness described in this book than I have with readings elsewhere. As a carer I find myself having weird experiences, and sometimes feeling frustrated and angry. I related to a lot to the enormous frustrations experienced by Jacqueline because of her illness, and also to what the du Pré family went through, trying to be supportive but sometimes finding themselves the focus for Jacqueline's rage. I found all of this reassuring.

There is however one gaping hole in my reading of this book. I am not a cello fan, and I am not familiar with Jacqueline's work, plus few of the composers mentioned in the book are ones that I particularly enjoy. I somehow feel I gave the book a subversive reading! I was reading it for all the **wrong** reasons. No matter. I'm glad I read it.

Since reading the book & writing this review I have heard so many negative comments about the authors, and their relationship with Jacqueline - comments particularly about Jacqueline's sister Hilary. Herewith an example of the sort of objections that can be found...

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/ja...>

Edith says

Jacqueline du Pre- born in 1945, English, cello prodigy and genius, professional debut at age 16, played for Pablo Casals, studied in Russia with Rostropovich, married to world-renowned pianist Daniel Barenboim, playing at her peak in her early 20's and performing in the highest venues the world over, muscular sclerosis diagnosed at age 28, in a wheel chair 18 months later, and dead at age 42.

First, I read this book and then watched the movie. HATED the movie. Do not bother with it- in no way does it do justice to the book. If I hadn't read the book, I would not have had a clue as to what was happening and it would not have made sense.

Second, what a story and what oddness there was in it! Jacqueline du Pre was a natural genius on the cello- absolutely no doubt about that, but this genius came in the form of a rather large, sometimes clumsy, lively, English country girl who had a natural bent toward silliness and frequently, crassness, along with a demanding personality. She seemed to have two sides...when she sat down with the cello, she BECAME the music and you could swear she had dropped straight from heaven from the hand of God. But there was another much darker side which plagued her and the people surrounding her.

Genius is always hard to reckon with for the "normal" folks who surround them. But I maintain that even genius needs to submit to certain limitations in keeping with societal norms, and this extends to not expecting/taking/requesting your sister's husband for carnal purposes because you are having a breakdown and are feeling excessively needy and your own husband is not fitting the bill. And doing this right under your sister's nose and ostensibly, with her consent. What?? This is some tremendously odd stuff and it's hard to understand this part of the story.

Mind you, these two sisters had a deep and unusually close relationship from early on, although over the years, they spent a lot of time apart because Jackie was off performing all over the world with her musician husband and Hilary married a musician, made a stable home, had four children, and raised dairy cows, goats, sheep, & chickens and tended a self-sufficient garden as well. So it was interesting to read this book as a "sister story" on one level.

I was also stuck hard by the amazing mother of these two daughters, Iris Greep. She went through years as a maligned "pushy" mother when Jackie was attacked by muscular sclerosis, but she appeared to me to be the most supportive mother ever (according to her daughter's rendition of her in the book, that is) and a HUGE factor behind Jackie's success as a musician. She was one remarkable woman. The music she composed and hand wrote, with illustrations, to teach little 5-year-old Jackie, and put by her bedside where she would find it first thing in the morning and race downstairs to learn a new song....wow!

I was fascinated by this story even though it was more a retelling of events and not so much a delving into the "whys" of certain behaviors. I am still very curious about the "whys" and think an insightful psychologist would have a heyday with this family.

Finally, I have fallen in love with Jacqueline's signature piece- the Elgar Cello Concerto in E Minor and invite you to have a listen to a small piece of a documentary of her life which finishes with the exquisite Elgar Concerto- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nnt46x...>

Gabriela Francisco says

I started the book admiring Jacqueline, and ended it pitying her. Truly, there is a cost to everything. We mortals are more blessed than we imagine.

A.U.C. says

Even though I think that everybody can enjoy this book, I especially recommend it to musicians, such as myself. This is mostly because you will understand the music passages, and because you will find a special delight and understanding in the love that the protagonist had for her instrument that not even music-lovers would understand. Even though I play the trumpet and the guitar, it still is a little hard to understand.

That is probably what I enjoyed the most about *Hilary and Jackie*. The music. I don't know how to describe it: the relationship that the characters in this story had with their music and their instruments was remarkable. I really don't know how to describe it.

I will admit that I didn't enjoy the second half of the book as I did for the first: Not because it wasn't good, but because it was too much drama and too little music. I really do think that the magic of this book is in the music.

One of the things that really is shocking about this testimony is the amount of honesty poured into its pages; How Hilary and Piers du Pré managed to confess all of the scandals that are portrayed here is unbelievable. I wonder if they didn't care about their sister's image: They do blame it all on her illness but I still think it's amazing. I would never have expected them to be *that* honest! It makes for an entertaining book, though.

However, this was a terrible story, yet it didn't transmit much emotion. I don't know why. Maybe I should re-read it? I think that at the end I wasn't really concentrated so I didn't enjoy it or feel as much as I believe I should have: but this book is certainly of the kind that is worth the read.

And I've been told that the movie is better!

(Another thing about this is that I hated the title. Why on Earth did they change it? "A Genius in the Family" is a pretty good title but "Hilary and Jackie" couldn't be worse; mostly because this book was a joint collaboration between Piers and Hilary! This is the biggest reason I didn't give it five stars.)

Oh, by the way: I'm not the kind that subtracts points from a book because of its content. I realize that some of the things about it were rather, umm, unusual.

Rudy Seifert says

A 2 star book about a 4 star subject.

Beth says

I saw the movie, Hilary and Jackie, and now have read the book. It was in the bed and breakfast we stayed in when we visited Becca and Luca in Brooklyn and I'd forgotten to bring something to read. Becca found it.

I think the book and movie go together very well. Jackie du Pre, a tremendously talented concert cellist, was married to the conductor Daniel B . . . can't spell his name. Shortly after her career had taken off she got MS and was not able to play. She died in her late 40s. The book is written by her older sister, Hilary (a concert flautist), and younger brother, Piers (a BOAC pilot). All three were/are very talented, but Jackie was the Genius in the Family (the former title of the book). One of the really bizarre things that took place happened toward the end of Jackie's career and at the apparent beginning of MS. Jackie had an affair with Hilary's husband, with Hilary's blessings. The book helps explain the dynamics of the triangle. The story is also a bit of a detective story. Hilary and Piers write this memoir/biography then go back and try to trace the beginnings of Jackie's MS. At the time it seemed to strike very quickly. In retrospect, she probably had intermittent symptoms for some time --- hence her need of comfort from Hilary's husband, hence her emotional ups and down with her own husband.
