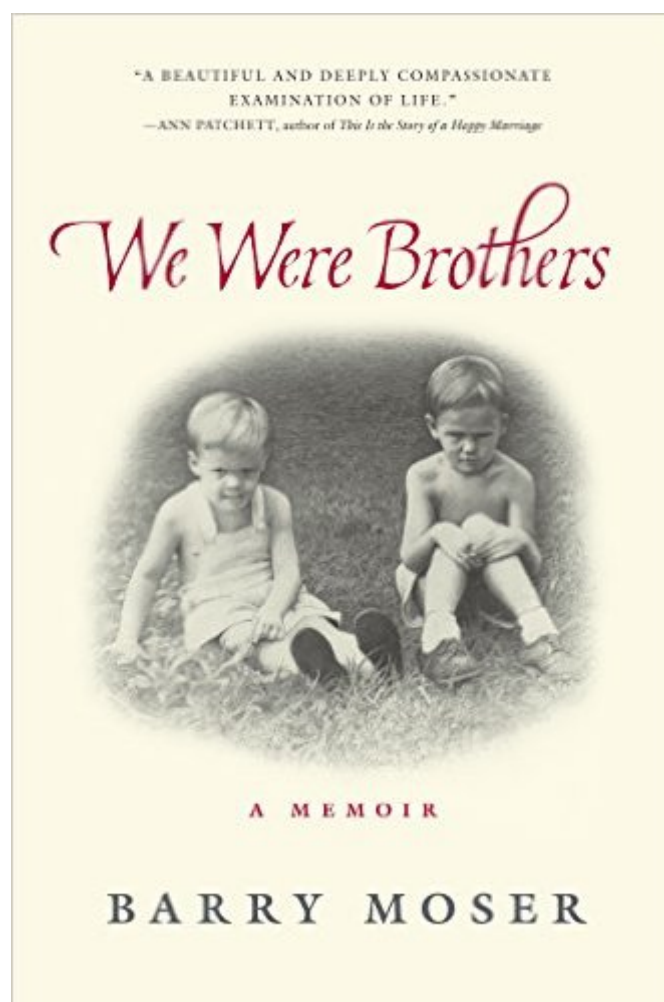


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We Were Brothers



Synopsis

Brothers Barry and Tommy Moser were born of the same parents in Chattanooga, Tennessee, slept in the same bedroom, went to the same school, and were both poisoned by their family's deep racism and anti-Semitism. But as they grew older, their perspectives and their paths grew further and further apart. Barry left Chattanooga for New England and a life in the arts; Tommy stayed put and became a mortgage banker. From attitudes about race, to food, politics, and money, the brothers began to think so differently that they could no longer find common ground. For nearly forty years, there was more strife between them than affection. After one particularly fractious conversation when Barry was in his late fifties and Tommy was in his early sixties, their fragile relationship fell apart. With the raw emotions that so often surface when we talk of our siblings, Barry recalls how they were finally able to traverse that great divide and reconcile their troubled brotherhood before it was too late. *We Were Brothers*, written and illustrated by preeminent artist Barry Moser, is a powerful story of reunion told with candor and regret that captures the essence of sibling relationships, with all their complexities, contradictions, and mixed blessings.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Barry Moser is the illustrator of beautiful children's books and the bible in many versions, so when I heard a radio interview about this memoir, I was intrigued. He had grown up in the South and moved away, leaving behind his closest sibling. The memoir deals, he said, with racism, his brother and his own, and their estrangement. Barry was an infant when his biological father

died of a brain tumor, and his brother, Tommy, was three. Arthur Moser had been larger than life, a gambler whose winnings supplemented his salary and enabled his wife, Billie, to have life of some luxury. She married again, to Chesher Holmes whose salary would support her and the boys and his daughter, Jeanne, although not so flamboyantly. The boys called him Daddy. Almost from the beginning the boys fought. Tommy was born with amblyopia, which was not addressed surgically. This disability made him nearly blind in one eye, and he was held back in school two years. Perhaps rage drove him to beat up on his little brother. Billie told Barry to fight back, but Barry was reluctant and for years was his brother's punching bag. The fights grew vicious. The boys were not good students, but they drew from an early age, and their father brought home butcher's paper that they spread on the kitchen table, often engaging in scenes from the ongoing World War II, which seemed quite exciting from a distance. The boys attended a military prep school in Chattanooga on scholarship as day students. The hazing there was brutal, especially on the bus home, and Tommy dropped out two years before graduation. Barry graduated and went on to college, while his brother spent time in the military and began a successful business career. Eventually, Barry moved to New England and the two became more estranged.

Every now and then I crave a good memoir, not any memoir, but I generally look for one that I can relate to, one that is apt to stick with me for one reason or another. *We Were Brothers* was just such a memoir. In many ways this story reminded me of the sometimes troubled relationship of my own two older brothers who grew up in the late 40's and 50's, both were about the same ages as author and his brother Tommy. The author and his older brother Tommy were born and raised around Chattanooga, TN, and from an early age racism was ever present in their childhood town. The KKK was in full force and the divide between blacks and whites was present everywhere. Through no fault of their own each brother was raised to believe that white people were superior to black people. In many ways their childhood, minus the racism, was typical of many siblings -- sharing a room, riding bikes and trying to avoid bullies, especially since neither boy was athletic. Both were talented artists and each had childhood afflictions that in some ways made learning and success in school a challenge. Tommy had eye issues which kept him behind a few grades in school and may have attributed to his sometimes volatile personality. Barry was dyslexic and more laid back and, despite the issues of both brothers they attended military school even though it was only Barry who graduated. The older the brothers got the greater the divide between them became, because of their adult views on race. While Tommy remained in Tennessee, Barry moved to New England, embarrassed at times by his brother's actions.

Most readers of this review are part of a family unit and have siblings. The relationships between siblings are longer than parent/child relationships; in an average life span, we're there to the end with our brothers and sisters. Our relationships with our sibs is maybe one of the most difficult to write about. We expect unconditional love from our siblings; sometimes we get it, sometimes we don't. Sometimes - even sharing DNA and physical space - we're totally different from our brothers and sisters. This is what author and illustrator Barry Moser discusses in his memoir, "We Were Brothers". Barry Moser and his older brother, Tom, were the only children of a mother left widowed when Barry was a few months old. She remarried a several years later to a man who adopted the boys in both his heart and mind. He provided for the boys and acted as a real father would. "Daddy", their step-father, was an excellent father, and with their mother, provided the boys with a relatively happy early life. But the boys - Barry and Tom - just never got along. They were very different personalities who seemed to react as oil and water. As they grew older, they grew even further apart as Barry moved north from the Chattanooga he was raised in. Moved away from the casual racism, anti-Semitism, and gun culture. It was only late in life they reconciled and came to a middle ground, realising they loved each other and cherished their relationship. Barry Moser is unsparing as he describes the two brothers' lives both together and separately. Fighting both verbally and physically were part of growing up together. Tom Moser still subscribed to the racism he grew up with, while Barry was able to leave his upbringing behind.

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