

Secret Daughter

Contributed by John Manhold
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Secret Daughter, ISBN 978-0-14-311211-2, Penguin paperback, 304 pages, \$15.00 by June Cross chronicles her tumultuous life. It begins with her early childhood where she is the child of a white mother and a popular black entertainer father in an era when such relationships were not accepted. As a young child, her skin color is very light, but begins to darken as she begins to grow. Because of the mores of the time, her mother, who has show business ambitions, cannot withstand the stigma attached to the situation. She leaves the child with 'Aunt Peggy', a highly respected black teacher in Atlantic City, N. J., who is unable to have children and is married to a man who is not adverse to the idea of taking in and raising the child.

The little girl is loved by her mother and makes frequent trips to pass enjoyable time with her and her 'show business friends' in various parts of the country and world, but is always introduced as a friend, friend's child, or other, and finally, when the mother marries, as her husband's adopted daughter. (The husband was Larry Storch, most prominently remembered as second banana in the acclaimed TV series F-Troop.) The trips are greatly enjoyed, but for obvious reasons, diametrically opposite to her life as the very much loved child of Aunt Peggy and her husband in a moral, middle class black cultural existence.

The effect of shuttling between these two cultures during childhood, teens, and beyond obviously is not the best for a person's developing psyche. Added to this is the fact that interracial relationships existed throughout the extended families with many causing anguish to June. Multiple examples of the brutal blows to the child's developing ego are provided throughout the book. Her mother remarked to her one day in conversation, 'Too bad you became so dark or you could have passed.' Another instance was when attending a family funeral, June was not allowed to enter the limo with her mother and Peggy, while rarely encountered nieces and nephews were. She was shuffled to one further back.

It is not surprising that June Cross has provided a most interestingly written work in that she has produced numerous shows for the various networks, and has received many awards for her writing skills. But perhaps, the amazing thing about this book is that it describes all of the crazy mixed-up scenario in a matter-of-fact manner that provides heart-wrenching insight to the mental flagellation the child endures, and yet allows the reader to see the strange love the developing person was able to retain for the mother. She sums it up quite well. 'Aunt Peggy and the black community of Atlantic City had given me a sense of place and belonging, while my mother had broadened my horizons far beyond that seaside town. I knew, despite all the pain we'd endured, that she had done the right thing.' Secret Daughter, presents a most entertaining read that also provides very interesting glimpses into subtle differences between black and white cultures.