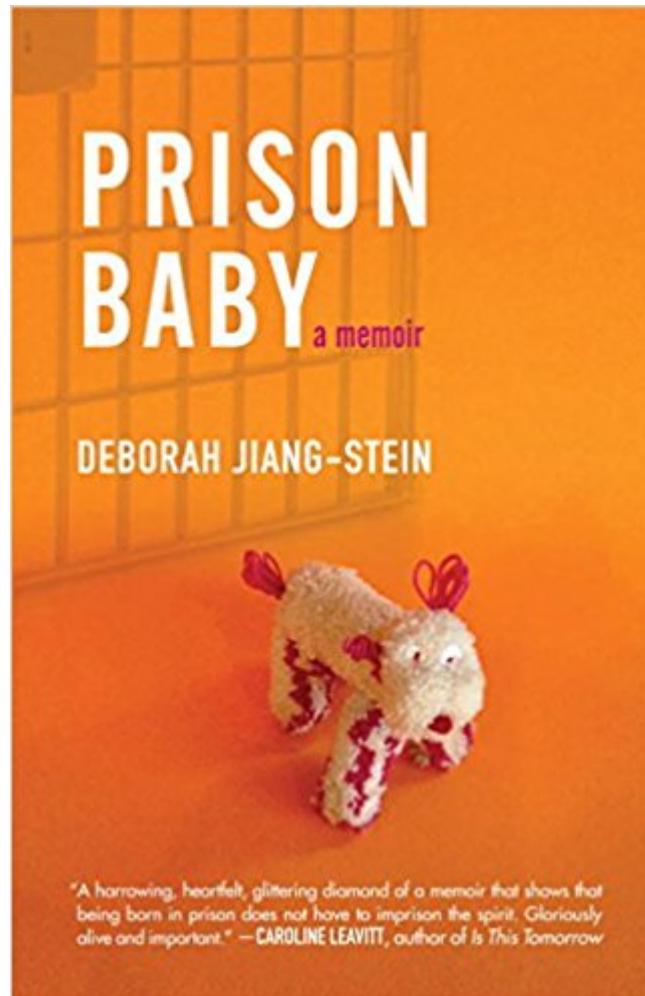




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# Prison Baby: A Memoir



## Synopsis

A deeply personal and inspiring memoir recounting one woman's struggles--beginning with her birth in prison--to find self-acceptance. Even at twelve years old Deborah Jiang Stein, the adopted daughter of a progressive Jewish couple in Seattle, felt like an outsider. Her multiracial features set her apart from her well-intentioned white parents, who evaded questions about her past. But when Deborah discovered a letter revealing the truth--that she was born in prison to a heroin-addicted mother and spent the first year of her life there--she spiraled into emotional lockdown. For years she turned to drugs, violence, and crime as a way to cope with her grief. Ultimately, Deborah overcame the stigma, shame, and secrecy of her birth and found peace by helping others--proving that redemption and acceptance is possible, even from the darkest corners.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A book of hope for lives that need turning around." "Kirkus Reviews" Jiang-Stein's journey and her captivating account of it are beyond astonishing." "Minneapolis Star-Tribune" "[A] unique and startling memoir...poetically written." "School Library Journal" "The moving story provides a glimpse at the heart and struggles of adoptees and the importance of learning the truth of their stories and getting help in understanding the sometimes difficult information. â definitely a must-read." "Adoption Today" "What shines through Prison Baby is Stein's intrepid spirit. Hers is a story of self-actualization born of a constant search for hidden truths in the world's cracks and crevices." "TruthOut" "The ways this woman discovers herself, via the revelation of her birth mother and her reconciliation with her adoptive mother, show us how dramatically different worlds

intersect, and why those intersections are so important to who we are. A powerful story. "Piper Kerman, author of *Orange Is the New Black* Deborah Jiang Stein has beaten the cycle of intergenerational incarceration, despite the odds against her "multiracial, born in a federal prison to a heroin-addicted mother. Her story offers hope to the possibility of personal transformation for anyone. "Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking* and Pulitzer Prize nominee "Thank you for emerging the kind and whole person your words make clear you are. "Gloria Steinem "A harrowing, heartfelt glittering diamond of a memoir that shows that being born in prison does not have to imprison the spirit. Gloriously alive and important." "Caroline Leavitt, New York Times bestselling author of *Pictures of You and Is This Tomorrow* "Prison Baby, "one woman's profound quest for family and identity, is also a soul stirring call to arms on behalf of incarcerated women and their children. It's a story of lost and found, conflict and peace, and proof that with love, forgiveness, and support, people really do change their lives." "Tayari Jones, author of *Silver Sparrow* "This book defines what it is to be American, a woman caught in the whirlwinds of change, who finds the strength in herself to confront the challenges and overcome them. Wonderful." "Jimmy Santiago Baca, author of *A Place to Stand* and American Book Award winner "A compelling story of loss, addiction, and healing told with grace and much heart. "Heidi W. Durrow, New York Times best-selling author of *The Girl Who Fell From the Sky* "At a time when more and more women are being incarcerated worldwide, Deborah Jiang Stein's story of the secrets and ignominy surrounding her prison birth gives readers a brave account of the backlash children and society encounter when families are torn apart by addiction, prison, and shame. More than anything, Deborah's book is a call for an open-eyed examination of our broken criminal justice system, and a heartfelt plea for more compassionate responses to poverty and mental illness. "Naseem Rakha, author of *The Crying Tree* "A profoundly moving search for identity, *Prison Baby* is as inspiring as it is haunting. Deborah Jiang Stein's bold, and intrepid honesty will speak to anyone who has struggled with grief, forgiveness, and finding their place in the world." "Katrina Kittle, author of *The Blessings of the Animals* "Prison Baby is an emotionally charged, transformative story about one woman's search for her true origins. Candid and searing, Deborah Jiang Stein's memoir is a remarkable story about identity, lost and found "and about the author's journey to reclaim "and celebrate "that most primal of relationships, the one between mother and child. I dare you to read this book without crying. "Mira Bartok, author of *The Memory Palace* "Prison Baby hits all the emotions of the who, what, where, when and why's of adoption right on the head of the nail! Some real deep life stuff is in these pages. It stirs the soul. I can relate to being in a similar predicament where I didn't

look like anyone in my family. If you want to know the truth about finding who you really are, this is the story! Adopted or not."â "Darryl "DMC" McDaniels, adoptee and Founder of hip-hop group Run-DMC

Deborah Jiang Stein is a national speaker, writer, and founder of the unPrison Project, a 501(c)3 nonprofit that serves to build public awareness about women and girls in prison and offers mentoring and life-skills programs for inmates. She lives in the Midwest.

I was interested in this book long before it was released. I had been online friends with the author for quite a while and supported her projects, but had no idea of what her writing style would be. PRISON BABY touched my heart. When Deborah was twelve-years-old, she discovered, while snooping through her adoptive mother's dresser drawers, that her birth mother was a heroin addict and was in prison when Deborah was born. Since she was very young, she had fleeting memories of people viewing her through bars. It was easy to dismiss these flashes as the dowels on the side of her crib. Now, they had another possible meaning. She holds nothing back, owning her years of crime and drugs and separation from the wonderful Jewish couple who adopted her. She wanted information about her birth mother to find a key to her unknown mixed ancestry. She did not fit any mold. This is an amazing book of love, hope, forgiveness, and worthwhile ways of giving back. Deborah's writing style is superb; how could it not be? Her adoptive parents were well known in the literary circle, and the guest lists for their dinner parties included some big names. Five stars from me.

Ms. Stein did what I thought was impossible -- she shocked me. This utterly fascinating story, about an adopted child who discovers she was born in prison, is so well written, so honest in its emotion, and so brave in its telling, is unforgettable. The chapter where she visits the prison where she was born, is some of the best writing I've read in years. This book is a triumph!

What a harrowing story! Deborah Jiang Stein tells the story of her prison birth in an amazingly powerful telling of not just her prison momma, but the author's slips through adolescence and adulthood. Born to an incarcerated heroine addict, Deborah is adopted by loving--yet strict--Jewish parents living in suburban Seattle. At a time when adoption and multiracial skin tones were not the "unusual," Deborah has questions. She finds the beginnings of answers tucked into a top drawer of her mother's dresser, on a slip of paper which she keeps the details to herself. Her life spins out of

control with drugs, sex, crime, an impulsivity she craves and yet cannot control. Filled with renderings of her life on the street, her call home, the visit to prison where she began her life, and through the cycle of addiction, Deborah comes to an understanding and reconciliation. Today, she's a national speaker, writer, and founder of the unPrison Project where she builds awareness of women in prison, and offers mentoring and writing programs for inmates. PRISON BABY is a definite read for anyone who has questioned their identity, their bond with their mother, and perhaps even reaching a bit--the definition of what it means to be an American.

Reading this memoir I felt charmed, saddened, angered and charmed all over again. It is not meant to be self-help and Deborah Jiang Stein resists being some kind of poster child for those born in prison or other dire circumstances. But still, when I finished it I wanted to do something better with my life and time. While I cannot relate to being born in a prison or transracially-adopted, I feel connected to her story in other ways: as a recovering alcoholic who has it in the genes; as the sister of an transracially-adopted brother who struggled, growing up with attachment, identity, addiction; and most compellingly, as the mother of transracially-adopted children. This book should be read by those who think incarceration is the right response to addiction. OK it might not change their minds. It also should be read by those who think love and privilege is enough for a child removed from their parents but it probably won't change their minds, either. But those of us who are already in the choir can feel stronger for reading of Deborah's survival and recovery. It also has a bit of intrigue and suspense but it is not structured to be entertaining and I am often suspicious of memoirs that are structured to be page turners. You might even get a little bored if you are looking for entertainment. Also you might be tempted not to believe her story. But as she travels to women's prisons, Deborah Jiang Stein finds many women who have had the experiences her first mother had-- of being forced to give birth in prison for crimes related to addiction. This s\*\*\* happens. As an adoptive parent and as a recovering addict, the most pain I felt--the places I cried--were in Deborah's description of how sorry she felt as her adoptive mother was dying. The timeline is a bit hazy but it appeared that they had reconciled already. Yet in her generous care of her mother in her dying days, Deborah just could not express enough regret. As a mother, I wanted to forgive her myself as no doubt her mother did. I already forgive my kids for a lot of attachment-related rejections because I know that they didn't choose their circumstances, nor were their circumstances just. However, as a recovering addict, I do not fully forgive myself for my clueless, heartless behaviors when I had my emotions and empathy buried under an ocean of alcohol and I thank God I didn't have kids at the time, but I did have parents and I did hurt them and I do feel tremendous

remorse about that. So I get how hard self-forgiveness can be. But I also found myself wishing that her mother had tried harder to understand Deborah's needs and especially had not kept the secrets from Deborah or tried to smother all questions with her love and her parental competence. At the same time, her parents adopted Deborah without any benefit of generational hindsight. Adoption research surveys indicate that not until the 1970's did more than a thousand white families include adopted children of color. My pioneering parents stretched beyond the margins to adopt me. But whenever I asked my mother about my caramel-colored skin and button nose, about the hint of an almond shape to my eyes, she'd tell me she loved me and that I was one of the family. I was too scared to eke out even one word to her in response, to tell her I didn't feel part of anything. -DJS

My parents adopted my mixed-race (considered black) brother at almost the same time in US history as Deborah was adopted, the 1960's. It was a time when being color blind was considered a virtue by those who disagreed that racism should be the standard way to sort humanity. So-called color blindness was, in fact, a radical stance in opposition to legally-sanctioned segregation. Sadly for them, the children who were and still are transracially adopted in the US are the guinea pigs in a social experiment with unquantified results. Those of us with hindsight, who want to dig deeper, have learned that color blindness is actually a sanitized form of racism. If we say we do not see the color of others' skin (which we literally cannot ignore), then we are saying we do not see their differences; therefore, we do not see them. Rendering someone invisible will result in a failure of empathy that Deborah experienced from her loving, privileged parents. That failure of empathy can lead to the diminishing response that transracial adoptees who express mixed feelings are bitter, ungrateful and unwelcome in any conversation about it. Because of my personal experience and reflection, I was aware of these dynamics when we began our adoption journey but I really wanted to be a parent. It was a fundamentally selfish impulse which is why I brush aside any kudos directed my way. I tried to get pregnant a few times but I was at an age when fertility was not something to pursue at any length. When I announced (because I am the announcer) that my husband and I would attempt to adopt locally and seek same-race adoption, I ran into a world of problems that I won't go into for this review. When I decided by default that transracial adoption would be acceptable, it felt a bit like making a deal with the devil. I rationalized that I live in a new era, that I had learned lessons from my brother's and others' adoptions, that I am not ideologically color-blind and that I am willing to tell my children the truth as I know it (the "as I know it" part being a major obstacle). However, the results of the social experiment in which we attempt to reverse the wrongs done by previous adoption policies-without reversing the actual policies-is still pending results. Maybe there is no way to get it right. I really cannot know in the long term if my kids will be OK. I

read memoirs and to be honest, sometimes my greatest fear is that my kids will write memoirs that indicate my cluelessness. Yes, the love will come through, but privileged cluelessness is impossible to completely eradicate. As soon as we white adoptive parents think we have it figured out, we are guilty of hubris. Perhaps the best we can hope for, embrace, accept is Deborah's conclusion about sorrowjoy, which really needs to be a word. "Yes, I'm happy today, and for no specific reason at all I'm filled with joy. If I'm sad and sorrowful at times for whatever comes about, in the same moments I can feel contentment and find humor and joy. Sorrowjoy, because if we sit still inside and let it in, they live together and we thrive. -DJS" Preach it sistah!

An incredible book. I read the author's first book, "Even Tough Girls Wear Tutus" in one sitting. I could not wait for Deborah's second book to come out, and read it as soon as it arrived. Deborah Jiang Stein is to be admired, for the life she has lived and for the books she has written. Every reader can take away something from this book. As engrossing as it is, I find the work the author is doing in women's prisons even more incredible. I would suggest this book to anyone.

This book clearly shows how broken the system is, This little girl's life could of been so different if she would of had answers early on. Her adoptive parents should of shared the information they had with her. This book makes you cry and hurt for this little girl. But you also Cheer every step that she took to find out who she. Five Stars any one who works with children should read this .

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