



# Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret

By Steve Luxenberg

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**Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret** By Steve Luxenberg

- The Great Michigan Read 2013-14
- Michigan Notable Book for 2010
- A *Washington Post Book World's* "Best Books of 2009," Memoir

Beth Luxenberg was an only child. Or so everyone thought. Six months after Beth's death, her secret emerged. It had a name: Annie. Steve Luxenberg's mother always told people she was an only child. It was a fact that he'd grown up with, along with the information that some of his relatives were Holocaust survivors. However, when his mother was dying, she casually mentioned that she had had a sister she'd barely known, who early in life had been put into a mental institution. Luxenberg began his researches after his mother's death, discovering the startling fact that his mother had grown up in the same house with this sister, Annie, until her parents sent Annie away to the local psychiatric hospital at the age of 23.

Annie would spend the rest of her life shut away in a mental institution, while the family erased any hints that she had ever existed. Through interviews and investigative journalism, Luxenberg teases out her story from the web of shame and half-truths that had hidden it. He also explores the social history of institutions such as Eloise in Detroit, where Annie lived, and the fact that in this era (the 40s and 50s), locking up a troubled relative who suffered from depression or other treatable problems was much more common than anyone realizes today.

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## **Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret** By Steve Luxenberg Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

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**\*Starred Review\*** Throughout her life, Luxenberg's mother, Beth, reveled in her status as an only child. Then, a few years before her death in 1999—and utterly out of the blue—she admitted to having a mentally and physically disabled younger sister named Annie, who died in 1972. Beth's failing health precluded Luxenberg and his siblings from learning any more. After Beth's passing, Luxenberg set out in search of answers. His dual roles as reporter and son proved both blessing and curse; the journalist dug furiously for facts, while the son wondered if long-buried secrets were best kept that way. His questions were many: What prompted Annie's commitment, at age 21, to Eloise Hospital, southeastern Michigan's sprawling psychiatric facility? Why was there next to no record of her early years? Most baffling of all, why did Beth, two years Annie's senior, refuse for so long to acknowledge her sibling's existence? Armed with superb investigative skills and relentless determination, Washington Post senior editor Luxenberg tracked down remaining family and friends and interviewed an exhaustive list of experts who might shed light on Annie's plight. Part memoir, part mystery, part history of the mental-health movement, *Annie's Ghosts* is a fascinating account of a life lived in the shadows and a family beset by despair. --Allison Block

### Review

Steve Luxenberg's hunt for the story of his hidden aunt is both a gripping detective story and a haunting memoir. It will leave you breathless. The personal tale is astonishing, and Luxenberg uses it to explore, in a deft and poignant way, the nature of secrets, memories, historical truth, and family love."?Walter Isaacson, *author of Einstein and Benjamin Franklin*

"*Annie's Ghosts* is perhaps the most honest, and one of the most remarkable books I have ever read. It is an exploration into a family's past, a relentless hunt that unearths buried secrets with multiple layers and the uncertain motives of their keepers, and one son's attempt to fully understand the details and meaning of what has been hidden. "What to believe?" Luxenberg asks many times and in many ways as he sifts through documents, his probing interviews, his parents' letters, his own travels and recollections. From mental institutions to the Holocaust, from mothers and fathers to children and childhood, with its mysteries, sadness and joy--this book is one emotional ride."?Bob Woodward

"*Annie's Ghosts*, his wise, affecting new mamoir of family secrets and posthumous absolution. . . . Beth told her son often that she loved him. *Annie's Ghosts* is his elegy in return, a poignant investigative exercise, full of empathy and sorrowful truth."?The Washington Post

"Steve Luxenberg sleuths his family's hidden history with the skills of an investigative reporter, the instincts of a mystery writer, and the sympathy of a loving son. His rediscovery of one lost woman illuminates the shocking fate of thousands of Americans who disappeared just a generation ago."?Tony Horwitz, *author of Confederates in the Attic*

"*Annie's Ghosts* will resonate for many, whether the chords have to do with family secrets, the Depression, memories of a thriving Detroit, Holocausts horrors, or the immigrant experience.

"For me, the word to describe this book: Unforgettable."?Detroit Free Press

This is a book about secrets: family secrets, secrets as wounds, secrets that begin as tactics and end as shackles. Like an archaeologist obsessed, Steve Luxenberg digs to unearth the long-buried truth about his mother's hidden sister, and as we travel with him on his quest, we find ourselves digging alongside him, we

start to see how the pieces fit together, and we not only learn about his family, we learn about lost worlds and a lost time, we learn about ourselves, and we learn about the universally wounding, shackling, echoing life of secrets."? **Walter Reich, former director, Holocaust Museum**

"*Annie's Ghosts* is one of the most remarkable books I have ever read . . . From mental institutions to the Holocaust, from mothers and fathers to children and childhood, with its mysteries, sadness, and joy--this book is one emotional ride."? **Bob Woodward, author of *The War Within and State of Denial***

"I started reading within minutes of picking up this book, and was instantly mesmerized. It's a riveting detective story, a moving family saga, an enlightening if heartbreaking chapter in the history of America's treatment of people born with what we now call special needs."? **Deborah Tannen, author of *You Just Don't Understand and You're Wearing That?***

"This is a memoir that pushes the journalistic envelope . . . Luxenberg has written a fascinating personal story as well as a report on our communal response to the mentally ill."? **Helen Epstein, author of *Where She Came From and Children of the Holocaust***

About the Author

**Steve Luxenberg** has been a senior editor with the *Washington Post* for 27 years. He lives in Baltimore, MD. This is his first book.

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**John Valdez:**

Do you one among people who can't read enjoyable if the sentence chained in the straightway, hold on guys this aren't like that. This *Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret* book is readable simply by you who hate the perfect word style. You will find the data here are arrange for enjoyable studying experience without leaving possibly decrease the knowledge that want to deliver to you. The writer involving *Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret* content conveys objective easily to understand by many individuals. The printed and e-book are not different in the information but it just different as it. So , do you still thinking *Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret* is not loveable to be your top listing reading book?

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**Richard Eby:**

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