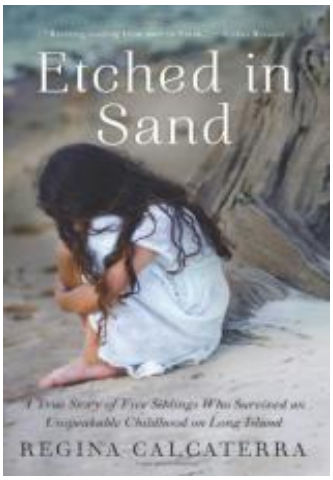
Etched in Sand

by Regina Calcaterra



About the Book

In this story of perseverance in the face of adversity, Regina Calcaterra recounts her childhood in foster care and on the streets --- and how she and her savvy crew of homeless siblings managed to survive years of homelessness, abandonment, and abuse. Regina Calcaterra's emotionally powerful memoir reveals how she endured a series of foster homes and intermittent homelessness in the shadow of the Hamptons, and how she rose above her past while fghting to keep her brother and three sisters together. Beautifully written and heartbreakingly honest, ETCHED IN SAND is an unforgettable reminder that regardless of social status, the American dream is still within reach for those who have the desire and the determination to succeed.

Discussion Guide

1. What was your perception of children on the fringe before reading ETCHED IN SAND? How has it changed? Do you think we, as a society, have the responsibility to reform the welfare system that looks out for them?

2. How does Calcaterra present the dynamic between her siblings and their mother? How does that dynamic shift throughout the book?

3. Are the harrowing stories of abuse and poverty that Regina grew up with in Etched in Sand accessible? How so?

4. ??I?ll get you back!? she?s screaming through the car window, but not because she?s lost what matters most to her. It?s because she?s lost her meal ticket.?
Regina?s first criticism on the welfare system is wondering how the government can keep giving her mother cash without ever checking where she spends it. How does this tie into Regina?s decision to dedicate her life to public policy?

5. How does the author present the social workers, foster parents, and teachers trying to "help" kids like Regina? Is she critical of them? Why can't they help a child living on the fringe, like her?

6. Do we feel sorry for Regina and her siblings? Why?

7. What is Regina?s relationship with religion? Is it significant that she does not believe in a god who would allow such terrible things to happen to children, yet collects Jesus figurines for comfort?

8. What roll does literature play in Regina's life? What about the women she idolizes, like Amelia Earheart? How do these strong women highlight the persistence in Regina?s personality that lets her become so successful in light of the desolate childhood that she had?

9. ?Norman and Rosie have always been ?the kids,? because they?re ?the kids? to our mother. She?ll say, ?Who?s taking care of the kids?? and I know she means Norman and Rosie. I have never been a kid.? Considering the adult way that Regina takes responsibility over her younger siblings and the rare but rich moments they enjoyed when they were safe together, did Regina have a childhood? Did any of her siblings? How does this end up tying into the difficulty they have reuniting with Rosie years later?

10. Did **Etched in Sand** change your idea of childhood, and of family? Did it make you realize something that you perhaps took for granted?

11. What is being a "mother" in Regina's eyes? Is she a mother? Is Cookie?

12. "To me, being a foster kid is a little bit like being a dog." What is the author's attitude towards foster care? Do you think her portrayal is fair, given the fact that she included the first foster family she lived with, who actually treated her quite well?

13. Regina was incredibly quiet in school when she was young. How did she go from "sending signals to others to keep away from [her] so they never find out the truth about [her] life" to publishing a memoir about her entire story?

Author Bio

Regina?s memoir, ETCHED IN SAND, appeared on the *New York Times* Best Sellers lists for 16 weeks during 2013-14 rising to #2 on the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*?s Non-Fiction E-Books Best Sellers list and #6 on the *New York Times* Non-Fiction Combined Print & E-Books list. It also was been selected for One Book/One College reads and

integrated into college and high school curriculums.

For the past 26 years Regina has spent her policy, managerial and legal career in both the private and public sector. She is presently an attorney working for the State of New York.

Prior to her state appointment, Regina served as Chief Deputy to the Suffolk County Executive where she managed a county of over 1.6 million residents, a $2.7 billion annual budget and a 9,500-employee workforce. During her tenure she managed the county?s fiscal crisis and oversaw the county?s day-to-day operations and its immediate response and recovery to Superstorm Sandy.

The majority of Regina?s private sector experience was as a partner to Barrack, Rodos & Bacine, an internationally recognized securities litigation firm where she represented defrauded public and labor pension funds from those who committed corporate fraud on Wall Street.

She proudly serves as board vice president to You Gotta Believe, an organization that works towards finding older foster children forever homes.

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