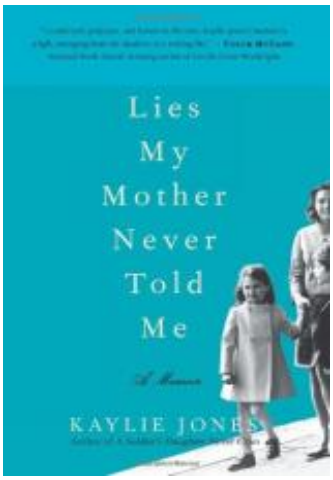
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Lies My Mother Never Told Me

by Kaylie Jones



About the Book

Her mother was a brainy knockout with the sultry beauty of Marilyn Monroe, a raconteur whose fierce wit could shock an audience into hilarity or silence. Her father was a distinguished figure in American letters, the National Book Award?winning author of four of the greatest novels of World War II ever written. A daughter of privilege with a seemingly fairy-tale-like life, Kaylie Jones was raised in the Hamptons via France in the 1960s and ?70s, surrounded by the glitterati who orbited her famous father, James Jones. Legendary for their hospitality, her handsome, celebrated parents held court in their home around an antique bar --- an eighteenth-century wooden pulpit taken from a French village church --- playing host to writers, actors, movie stars, film directors, socialites, diplomats, an emperor, and even the occasional spy. Kaylie grew up amid such family friends as William Styron, Irwin Shaw, James Baldwin, and Willie Morris, and socialized with the likes of Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, George Plimpton, and Kurt Vonnegut.

Her beloved father showed young Kaylie the value of humility, hard work, and education, with its power to overcome ignorance, intolerance, and narrow-mindedness, and instilled in her a love of books and knowledge. From her mother, Gloria, she learned perfect posture, the twist, the fear of abandonment, and soul-shattering cruelty. Two constants defined Kaylie?s childhood: literature and alcohol.

?Only one word was whispered in the house, as if it were the worst insult you could call someone,? she writes, ?alcoholic was a word my parents reserved for the most appalling and shameful cases --- drunks who made public scenes or tried to kill themselves or ended up in the street or in an institution. If you could hold your liquor and go to work, you were definitely not an alcoholic.?

When her father died from heart failure complicated by years of drinking, 16-year-old Kaylie was broken and lost. For solace she turned to his work, looking beyond the man she worshipped to discover the artist and his craft, determined that she too would write. Her loss also left her powerless to withstand her mother?s withering barbs and shattering criticism, or halt Gloria?s further descent into a bottle --- one of the few things mother and daughter shared.

From adolescence, Kaylie too used drink as a refuge, a way to anesthetize her sadness, anger, and terror. For years after her father?s death, she denied the blackouts, the hangovers, the lost days, the rage, the depression. Broken and bereft, she began reading her father?s novels and those writers who came before and after him --- and also pursued her own writing. With this, she found the courage to open the door on the truth of her own addiction.

Lies My Mother Never Told Me is the mesmerizing and luminously told story of Kaylie?s battle with alcoholism and her struggle to flourish despite the looming shadow of a famous father and an emotionally abusive and damaged mother. Deeply intimate, brutally honest, yet limned by humor and grace, it is a beautifully written tale of personal evolution, family secrets, second chances, and one determined woman?s journey to find her own voice --- and the courage to embrace a life filled with possibility, strength, and love.

Discussion Guide

1. What does the title of the book mean? What does the word ?lies? refer to? How does the title fit the memoir and especially the author?s relationship with her mother?

2. Think about the structure of the book. Why do you think the author included the vignettes at the beginning of each chapter? What do they add to Kaylie?s story?

3. What is your opinion of James and Gloria Jones? How did their lives as artists influence their children?s development, especially Kaylie?s? Would you want to attend a dinner party where they were guests?

4. Describe James and Gloria Jones?s marriage. How did their devotion to each other impact their connection to their children? What kind of parents were they? Describe Kaylie?s relationship with each. How did they compare?

5. Do you think Gloria?s behavior toward Kaylie a result of the alcohol or something deeper? Argue it from both viewpoints. What was their relationship like after Kaylie stopped drinking?

6. James Jones told his daughter not to let anyone make her feel guilty, that he was done with that. Was this good advice? What role does guilt play in our lives? When can guilt be good and when can it be destructive? How do you define the line between the two?

7. How did her father?s death when she was 16 impact Kaylie?s life? Though she had him for such a short period of her life, what did Kaylie learn from her father?

8. After her father?s death, the author turned to his books to learn more about him. Can we know someone through his or her work? Did this help Kaylie? Explain.

9. Kaylie regrets not having asked her father what books he was reading and why. Do you talk about books with others

outside your reading group? Do you ask them about their selections and choices?

10. In the memoir, the author talks a great deal about her father?s writing and her own. What did you discover about the writing process from the memoir?

11. Lies My Mother Never Told Me is a celebration of books and a love of literature. What do books offer us as a society? What do books mean to you personally?

12. Much has been written about the links between depression, alcoholism, addiction, and art. How does one influence or even inspire the other? If one had to choose, would it be better to live a short life and have art or to sacrifice creation for longevity and health?

13. Nelson Algren, an old family friend and fellow writer, warned Kaylie not to become a writer, decrying that ?the novel is dead.? How would you define the state of literature --- the novel --- today?

14. Kaylie Jones talks honestly about alcoholism, including her parents drinking and her own. How did her view of alcohol change over the years? What were the factors that led to her acknowledge her problem? What gave her the strength to quit? Why do you think Gloria couldn?t --- or wouldn?t?

15. Today, alcoholism is more widely accepted and discussed, yet as Kaylie explains, it was considered a dirty word in her house. Why do you think this was so? Why do many people still see it as a moral failing? How have we, as a culture, changed our perceptions of alcoholism over the past forty years?

16. Kaylie?s friend Gianna, offered inspiration to Kaylie for dealing with her mother. ?No is a sentence with a period at the end of it.? How did this advice affect Kaylie? How can others use this wisdom to help them overcome their own troubles?

17. How did mastering Taekwondo shape sober Kaylie?s outlook? What wisdom did she gain from the class and from her instructor, Mr. Bill? How was Mr. Bill like her father?

18. What insights did you gain from reading **Lies My Mother Never Told Me**?

Author Bio

Kaylie Jones was born in Paris, France in 1960 and attended French schools until her family returned to the U.S. in 1974. *A* ***Soldier's Daughter Never Cries***, her third novel, is loosely based on her experiences growing up in an expatriate, artistic home as the daughter of famed novelist James Jones. She originally began writing this story as her undergraduate honors thesis at Wesleyan University.

Jones' first novel, ***As Soon As It Rains*** (Doubleday), was published in 1986 when she was working at Poets & Writers, Inc. in the Reading/Workshops Program. There, she fell in love with the poetry of underprivileged children, written in workshops she helped to fund. As a result of this work, she was appointed as a Writer in Residence in the NYC public

schools, where she continues to work today.

A stay in Jamaica when she was two was interrupted by an evacuation due to the Cuban missile crisis, and this created in her a fascination for all things Russian. Jones began to study Russian as her third language at age eight, and continued to study the language and literature through her undergraduate and graduate years. She spent six weeks at the Pushkin Institute for Russian Studies in Moscow in the summer of 1984, followed by six months in 1987, which resulted in the novel ***Quite The Other Way***(Doubleday, 1989). Jones received an MFA in writing from Columbia University's School of the Arts and taught fiction workshops for several years at The Writer's Voice. She helped to found the MFA Program at Long Island University's Southampton campus, where she still teaches fiction.

A Phi Beta Kappa, Jones loves scuba diving and yoga. She is married to Kevin Heisler and considers their infant daughter, Eyrna, to be "her greatest accomplishment." In September of 1998, ***A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*** will be released as a Merchant Ivory film starring Kris Kristofferson and Barbara Hershey.

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