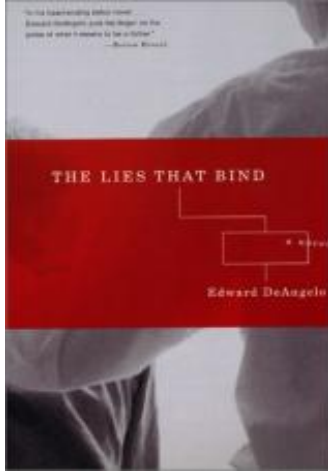


# The Lies that Bind

by Edward De Angelo

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## About the Book

What is a father?

Are blood ties more important than emotional bonds? Everyone has different answers to these questions. Divorce, adoption, and in vitro fertilization create gray areas that challenge even the most widely accepted definitions of parenthood. *The Lies That Bind* examines how one family is forced to find answers -- and how the struggle nearly destroys the lives of a father, a mother, and their son. The action starts when Peter Morrison makes a decision to find out for sure whether Sam, the son he adores, is really "his." But the trouble started way before that. It started when Pete pressured his wife into adopting a lifestyle she didn't want. It started with Pete's disappointment that Sam wasn't as interested in sports as he was. It started when Pete became absorbed in a fast-moving career that guaranteed him wealth and prestige but also consumed his time and creativity. And it started with Joan's silent decision to endure all of this because Pete wasn't listening to her anyway.

Before the divorce and the blood test, Pete was living the kind of life he had always dreamed of. He had a successful career, a beautiful wife, a healthy child, and a comfortable house. But it turns out that these things weren't real, that his job was different than he imagined it would be, that his marriage was a sham, that his comfortable house wasn't really a home. His son wasn't even his son.

The realizations that Pete grapples with are more than the garden-variety mid-life crisis. But the feeling that events are spiraling out of control, the sensation of wondering "How did I get here?" are all too common in modern life. In an attempt to figure out how he got there, Pete begins to peel back the layers of his life, tracing the decisions he made, recalling events, large and small, that provide clues to how his life veered so radically off course. He begins to see Sam and Joan as individuals, not just as the people he wanted them to be. He embarks on a relationship based on honesty and the needs of someone other than himself. While reporters pound on his door and lawyers argue over his head, Pete takes the important first steps toward a new life. One that is different than the one he imagined, but one that has a chance at

making him, and those around him, happy.

Is DNA more important than love? *The Lies That Bind* doesn't tell us. Instead, it tells the story of a man who, in an effort to answer the question, ends up with a new life. And it shows us that what matters is not the answer to the question, but the journey we undertake to find it.

## Discussion Guide

1. What do you think of Pete's decision to take the blood test? Which is the worse scenario -- living with the doubt, or living with the pain of knowing the truth?
2. How would this story have been different had Pete gone to Joan first with his doubts instead of going behind her back? Why didn't Pete pursue this option?
3. Why do you think Joan never told Pete that she might be pregnant with another man's child? What does her silence say about their relationship? What other clues do you have about the state of their marriage and the reasons for their divorce?
4. How is Dave a foil to Pete, and his marriage to Marie a foil to Pete and Joan's marriage? Why do you think DeAngelo included Dave, Marie, and their family in his story?
5. Pete obviously loves Sam, even after he discovers that Sam is not his biological son. But does Pete have a duty to support Sam financially? What do you think of Barry's strategy to sue Joan in civil court for fraud-a case that he would certainly not win in family court? How do you think this story would be different if Pete didn't have the means to play the "money card?" What if Sam's biological father had been wealthy?
6. Pete makes many references to the fact that Sam and he are different, with different talents and interests. Before the blood test, Pete and Sam often conflicted about sports and Sam appeared to feel inadequate about his own athletic capabilities. Had there never been a blood test, do you think these conflicts would have improved or gotten worse? Would Pete have ever really accepted Sam for who he was?
7. Over the course of the novel, Pete looks back on five years of weekends spent with Sam. How does their relationship grow over the course of these five years? Is it a "normal" relationship? How, in general, does divorce change the way parents -- especially fathers -- interact with their kids?
8. The author spares us the scene of Joan telling Sam that Pete is not his real father, leaving us to imagine Sam's reaction. How do you picture the scene? What would Sam be feeling? How would you feel if you were given this information at the same age?
9. Was Barry the right lawyer for Pete? Would someone less ruthless have been a better choice? Could Pete and Joan have settled their problems without going to court?
10. What did this novel teach you, if anything, about America's legal system?

11. In the end, does it really make a difference whether or not Pete is related to Sam by blood? How did this story change your own ideas of fatherhood, and of what it means to be a parent?

## Author Bio

Edward DeAngelo is a graduate of Harvard Law School and currently works in the Massachusetts Attorney General's office, specializing in family law. He lives in Cambridge, Mass., with his wife and twin sons.

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