



## Of Roots and Wings

*Julie D. Swope*

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The St. Francis Orphan Asylum, in the heart of Pennsylvania coal country circa 1949 was the institutional epitome of regimented order, reverent obedience, and carefully-guarded secrets, but for twenty-three month old Beverly and her seven siblings, it represented a strange new world that would effectively serve to disintegrate their family bonds, subject them to dehumanizing discipline and segregation by age, gender, and religion - and inflict upon them unspeakable abuse. *Of Roots and Wings* gives voice to these victims of unimaginable injury who endured their plight in a collective state of silent rage, as it recounts the life journey of this little girl in the form of an uplifting memoir of hope and self-acceptance that revisits the unbelievable, bizarre, enchanting, heartfelt, and hilarious moments and experiences that punctuated author Julie Swope's life. At age four, Beverly and her younger sister, Georgina are adopted by a prominent Italian doctor and his wife who live in a lavish forty-eight room mansion in Southeastern Pennsylvania where the girls are expected to shed not only the habits and customs of the orphanage, but also their names, becoming Julia and Jeannie. Their new older sister, the nine-year-old Kathleen, made a similar adjustment when she was adopted from St. Francis four years earlier. Another sister by blood, Nancy, joins them six months later when she is adopted into the family as Rose Marie. However, the material wealth and physical comfort of their new life do little to address the scars of the abuse and molestation the girls endured at the orphanage, and their new home reveals itself to house just as many dark secrets, including sexual abuse at the hands of the doctor and the family's trusted servants. With no other point of reference as to what constitutes normal family life, the inquisitive, indomitable Julia features in this spirited narrative as an intrepid guide to all things absurd and peculiar, akin to Alice on her adventures in Wonderland through the looking glass. For Julia accompanying her father to autopsies, helping him to tally income from a hospital-based numbers racket, or watching as mink stoles and color televisions get loaded through the back door of the house seems as commonplace as enjoying the "Howdy Doody Show" or having seconds of spaghetti at Sunday dinner. The story follows Julia from her school years to her becoming a wife and mother at age nineteen in the same year her adoptive mother succumbs to cancer. The book proceeds through the birth of her child, the reunification with her birth family and the adoption of five more amidst continuing abusive relationships as an adult. When she studies to become a psychologist she enters therapy and begins to recognize the past abuses and their lasting impact throughout her life. The deceptions and sorrows of life continue when she discovers her husband involved in a sexual relationship with her best friend. She endures and champions through a bitter divorce and custody battle. With stability entering her life she experiences multiple flashbacks which require painstaking therapeutic work. A gift provided later in life the Harp, becomes a passion. *Of Roots and Wings* reclaims and personalizes a past rife with hardship, abuse, dysfunction, and deception, and asserts with a sustaining tone of tenacity and humor fundamental lessons of self-discovery and lasting appreciation of what makes each of us special. Though she would not want anyone to endure her life she realizes that each negative experience brought her to the serenity of today. She passes on the gifts of hope, perseverance and tenacity to all readers.

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