



Brothers: On His Brothers and Brothers in History

George Howe Colt

Download now

Read Online ➔

Brothers: On His Brothers and Brothers in History

George Howe Colt

Brothers: On His Brothers and Brothers in History George Howe Colt

From the bestselling National Book Award finalist, a masterful blend of history and memoir featuring the author's four brothers and iconic brothers in history—the Thoreaus, the Van Goghs, the Kelloggs, the Marx brothers, and the Booths.

George Howe Colt's *The Big House* is, as the *New Yorker* said, "full of surprises and contains more than seems possible: a family memoir, a brief history of the Cape, an investigation of nostalgia, a study of class, and a meditation on the privileges and burdens of the past." Colt's new book, *Brothers*, is an equally idiosyncratic and masterful blend of memoir and history featuring both the author's three brothers and iconic brothers in history—the Booths, the Van Goghs, the Kelloggs, the Marx Brothers, and the Thoreaus.

Colt believes he would be a different man had he not grown up in a family of four brothers. He movingly recounts the adoration, envy, affection, resentment, and compassion in their shifting relationships from childhood through middle age, also rendering a volatile decade in American life: the 1960s. Some of the Colt men now have children; all have found their own paths; all now consider their brothers to be their closest friends.

In alternate chapters, Colt parallels his quest to understand how his own brothers shaped his life with an examination of the rich and complex relationships between iconic brothers in history. He explores how Edwin Booth grew up to become the greatest actor on the nineteenth-century American stage while his younger brother John grew up to assassinate a president. How Will Kellogg worked for his overbearing older brother John Harvey as a subservient yes-man for two decades until he finally broke free and launched the cereal empire that outlasted all his brother's enterprises. How Vincent van Gogh would never have survived without the financial and emotional support of his younger brother, Theo, in a claustrophobic relationship that both defined and confined them. How Henry David Thoreau's life was shadowed by the early death of his older brother, John, who haunted and inspired his writing. And how the Marx Brothers collaborated on the screen but competed offstage for women, money, and fame.

Illuminating and affecting, this book will be revelatory for any parent of sons, any sibling, anyone curious about how a man's life can be molded by his brothers. Colt's magnificent book is a testament to the abiding power of fraternal love.

Brothers: On His Brothers and Brothers in History Details

Date : Published November 27th 2012 by Scribner (first published January 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9781416547778

Author : George Howe Colt

Format : Hardcover 480 pages

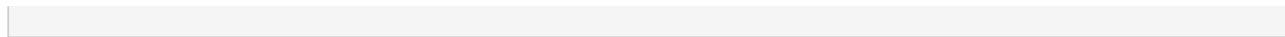
Genre : Nonfiction, Biography, Autobiography, Memoir, History, Family, Psychology



[Download Brothers: On His Brothers and Brothers in History ...pdf](#)



[Read Online Brothers: On His Brothers and Brothers in History ...pdf](#)



**Download and Read Free Online Brothers: On His Brothers and Brothers in History George Howe
Colt**

From Reader Review Brothers: On His Brothers and Brothers in History for online ebook

Ann Putney says

I enjoyed learning about various bands of brothers in history.

Michael says

Interesting idea, nicely executed. The author, one of four brothers, discusses all kinds of issues relating to brothers, including the relationships within his own family, psychological issues relating to brothers, and illustrations using famous brothers in history, such as John Wilkes Booth and his brothers, Vincent and Theo Van Gogh, the Kennedys, and many others. I am the same age as the author, and also am one of four brothers, so some things on the family historical side of the story were easy to relate to. I also have two sons, so it was interesting to see some of the same issues that I have seen with them discussed in the book. Definitely worthwhile reading.

Bree Hobgood says

I originally liked the premise of this book, a study of brotherhood, since I have 2 sons. Ultimately, I disliked the book for two reasons, although I found bits and pieces interesting. I felt that the chapters dedicated to famous brothers were too long and jumped around too much (often citing dozens of other brothers as long tangential side notes). I ended up skipping the last several chapters of this type because I just could not handle them. I liked the early chapters depicting the author and his brothers, but I eventually felt these chapters turned into long, boring love notes to his brothers. I like my memoirs with a healthier dose of dysfunction:-)

Stephanie says

I abandoned my plan of drinking my way around the world at the Wursthaus -- too expensive, too bourgeois -- in favor of downing pints of Guinness at the Plow & Stars, a cozy pub whose Irish overtones seemed far more literarily useful, or draining twenty-five-cent drafts at Whitney's, a blue-collar watering hole patronized by solitary middle-aged men whose silence I assumed spoke to oracular wisdom and not a pie-faced stupor as we marinated in the evening light tableau vivant I convinced myself was not pathetic but Hopperesque.
pg 265

Gail says

Very interesting and mostly well written book. The only thing I didn't like was the author broke up the stories about the brothers with tidbits about other brothers and research about sibling rivalry, etc. The book just didn't flow well.

Linda says

George Howe Colt is the second of four brothers, Harry, George, Ned, and Mark. Here he uses accounts of their lives together, with alternating chapters featuring famous brother combinations, to study the dynamics of brotherly relationships. As a child, George adored Harry and wanted to be just like him. Mark is several years younger than the other three, and really only figured as “the baby brother” in the others’ childhoods. They quarreled a lot, and at times were not particularly close to each other, although they came to be close friends in their adulthood. The famous brother chapters are about Edwin and John Wilkes Booth, John and Will Kellogg of cereal fame, Vincent and Theo van Gogh, Groucho Marx and his brothers, and John and Henry David Thoreau. All of these were fascinating to read, but I thought they were each a little too long, and in several places Colt interrupted his accounts of these other brothers and wrote several paragraphs about still more sets of brothers. I found these distracting. Edwin and John Booth were “good brother and bad brother.” John Kellogg controlled his brother Will to the point where Will never really developed a life of his own. Vincent van Gogh depended on his brother Theo for both financial and emotional support. The chapter on the Marx brothers is titled “Brothers, Inc.” John Thoreau died of lockjaw as a young man in his 20’s, and that chapter discusses the effect of a sibling’s death. I really enjoyed this book. The fact that Colt writes about his own brothers ties the other chapters together and makes the whole greater than its parts.

Mckinley says

Interesting and quick read about relationships between (famous) brothers.

Nick Freiling says

This book enriched my life in a small but meaningful way. It rambles at points, especially when relating stories of famous brothers through history, but hardly to its detriment. It's a grand work that I think any reader should appreciate -- especially those for whom family is very important. I found reading it to be unexpectedly cathartic -- I am close to my brother but had hardly stopped to consider just how important he is to me, and how powerfully my closeness (and rivalry) with him has shaped my understanding of self and the people around me.

David Schwinghammer says

BROTHERS by George Howe Colt is an unusual book in that it jumps back and forth between the doings of the four Colt brothers and other celebrity type brothers. Although they're extremely likable, perhaps the Colt segments are too long.

Some of what Colt discovers about brothers in general is old hat. The oldest brother tends to bond with his parents, tends to be more successful, seems more like a little adult. The youngest is more creative and has a tendency to take more chances. The poor guy or guys in the middle don't get as much attention from their

parents and don't have as much self confidence.

Although he covers several dozen brother groups, Colt concentrates on the Kelloggs (think breakfast cereals), The Boothes, The Marx brothers, The Van Goghs , and Henry and John Thoreau.

Maybe it's because I have five brothers and no sisters, I found this book fascinating. For instance Edwin Booth suffered from depression most of his life despite being the greatest actor of his day. The two older Booth brothers, June and Edwin, were also loyal to the Union, while John was a loyal rebel. John was also spoiled rotten by his older sister while Edwin acted as a "dresser" for his father, Junius Brutus Booth, (also considered the greatest actor of his times). The father was also mentally ill, although Colt suggests this may have been an act to draw crowds.

Perhaps the most interesting brothers (predictably I suppose) were the Marxes. Colt explains how they got their names. Their mother Minnie, whose younger brother was a vaudeville star, put them on the road at an early age and they got the names from a fellow performer while playing poker. Harpo because of the instrument he played; Groucho because of his disposition, Chico because he chased women constantly, Gummo because of his gum shoes. Zeppo became Zeppo because he imitated another performer named Zippo who was an exercise nut. Gummo is the least known because Minnie had him enlist in the army during WWI to save the stars of the act, Groucho and Harpo, from the draft. He did perform with his brothers for nine years prior to this however. Colt never explains why he never rejoined the act. The happiest of the brothers was Chico, despite gambling away his money as fast as he got it; ironically the unhappiest was the most successful, Julius "Groucho" Marx, who was, you guessed it, a middle child.

Back to the Colt brothers. Most were travelers; Ned became a foreign correspondent for NBC and in his youth spent time on a cattle ranch in Argentina. George, himself, went to Paris trying to imitate the stereotypical poet. Harry became a doctor and worked for a time on a Zuni reservation. Only Mark, the youngest stuck to home, but he worked as the recycling manager at a school for the blind. Ned wasn't the youngest, but there are several years between him and Mark, which made him fit the baby of the family role.

Some of the other brothers touched upon are Jesse and Frank James, Henry and William James, Saul Bellow and brothers, The Kennedys etc., etc.

Anne says

George Howe Colt is a talented writer, and he successfully weaves multiple stories about famous brothers together with a memoir of growing up with three brothers of his own to create what I think of as a great source of cocktail party trivia about brothers. There are lots of fun facts about the Booth Brothers, the Van Gogh brothers, the Marx brothers and more that you can drop into casual conversation. The book is well-researched but not particularly insightful. I had the impression that the author started out to write just the personal memoir but there wasn't enough meat to write a full story, so he added the famous people to elevate the story to brotherhood in general. The analysis doesn't seem precise enough, however, so that the book seems to hint at truths about brothers that seem relatively obvious. Sometimes brothers are very different; sometimes brothers fight; sometimes brothers work together; sometimes brothers are inseparable; sometimes they care for one another. The details in this book are interesting. The big picture, not so much.

Bailey says

What a fun book! Mr. Colt writes clarity about growing up with his three brothers, and the alternate chapter format (one chapter for his life, one chapter for a famous set of brothers) worked very nicely at keeping the story fresh, lively, and moving. I got this as a Christmas gift from an uncle, and have since given a copy to other family members, but kept my own copy for my library. Some chapters started to drag on at times, but Mr. Colt seemed to know when my attention span and want for details was wearing out. Very highly recommend!

J says

This was a rare non-fiction book that held my interest throughout the book, with a couple caveats. I enjoyed reading about family dynamics and how male siblings impact the development of each other.

Here are the caveats: Every other chapter is about the author's own family. The first such chapter was sweet & sentimental. However, as his family ages in later chapters, dysfunction and NY liberal politics invade. I'd highly recommend skipping all the subsequent chapters on the author's family. I'd also recommend skipping the last 'famous person' chapter on the Thoreau family. It is used as a pro-gay platform and an excuse for the author to talk more about his own family.

Amy says

I was very tempted to give up on this book in the early chapters because it wasn't consistently interesting. The author throws in every anecdote about every famous brother he could find, which makes for a slog. He also throws in so many theories about brotherhood (without footnotes, although there is bibliographic information in an appendix) that they contradict each other. For example, you might first read that the youngest of the family is spoiled and babied, and a few pages later read that the youngest is ignored. If he wanted to include broad analysis of brotherhood, he needed to spend more time digesting the literature on the topic and deciding what to include.

I also found it alarming that several of the famous brothers he chronicles, such as the Kelloggs and the Joyces, had the younger brother in a deeply codependent relationship that for many years constituted unpaid servitude. Yet the author does not mention codependency once anywhere in the book, and so his analysis that both brothers benefited from these relationships albeit in different ways is painfully lacking in understanding.

Why did I finish it? Because so many of the biographical chapters on historical brother pairings interested me. The relationships between the brothers he focused whole chapters on were generally painful or unpleasant, but I was interested in learning more about the van Goghs, the Thoreaus, etc. I also found myself generally interested in what the author had to say about his own upbringing. For example, the way we each see our place in the family differently was revealed when he discovered that although he thought his older brother was rewarded with elevation to a private bedroom at nine years old, the brother always felt he'd been exiled. Overall though, only an ok book.

(Contrary to another very odd review on Goodreads, there is nothing about liberal politics or homosexuality in the book anywhere.)

Catherine says

This is two books in one, with chapters about the complicated relationships of famous brothers in history (to name a few, Edwin and John Wilkes Booth, Theo and Vincent Van Gogh, W. K. and John Harvey Kellogg of breakfast food fame), and the life-long story of the author's complicated relationships with his own brothers. Having read George Howe Colt's earlier memoir, **The Big House**, I anticipated a well-written book chock full of interesting information and thoughtful analysis, and was not disappointed.

Iva says

A fascinating and well-researched portrait of some remarkable brothers: Edwin & John Wilkes Booth, John & Will Kellogg, Vincent & Theo Van Gogh, John & Henry Thoreau and the wild and crazy five Marx Brothers (Groucho, Zeppo, Chico, Harpo and Gummo.) Colt throws in small bits about other others such as the hoarding Collyer brothers, the Everly Brothers, and the James Brothers (Henry and William and Jesse James and his brother whose name I forgot!) One doesn't have to have had brothers to appreciate his take on the dynamics of the behavior of brothers: i.e. influence of birth order, competitiveness, and parental treatment for starters. Colt, an excellent writer and researcher, presents alternating chapters on his own three brothers, who, frankly, were not as interesting as his chosen subjects.
