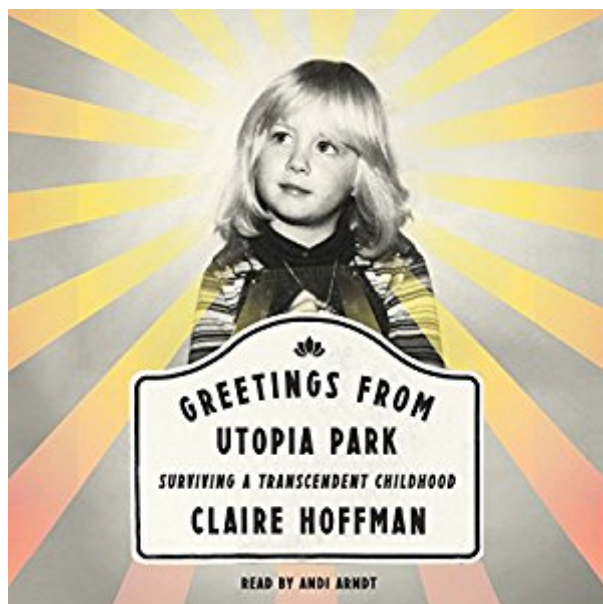


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Greetings From Utopia Park: Surviving A Transcendent Childhood



Synopsis

In this engrossing, provocative, and intimate memoir, a young journalist reflects on her childhood in the heartland, growing up in an increasingly isolated meditation community in the 1980s and '90s - a fascinating, disturbing look at a fringe culture and its true believers. When Claire Hoffman's alcoholic father abandons his family, his desperate wife, Liz, tells five-year-old Claire and her seven-year-old brother, Stacey, that they are going to heaven - Iowa - to live in Maharishi's national headquarters for Heaven on Earth. For Claire's mother, Transcendental Meditation - the Maharishi's method of meditation and his approach to living the fullest possible life - was a salvo that promised world peace and enlightenment just as their family fell apart. At first this secluded utopia offers warmth and support and makes these outsiders feel calm, secure, and connected to the world. At the Maharishi School, Claire learns Maharishi's philosophy for living and meditates with her class. With the promise of peace and enlightenment constantly on the horizon, every day is infused with magic and meaning. But as Claire and Stacey mature, their adolescent skepticism kicks in, drawing them away from the community and into delinquency and drugs. To save herself, Claire moves to California with her father and breaks from Maharishi completely. After a decade of working in journalism and academia, the challenges of adulthood propel her back to Iowa, where she reexamines her spiritual upbringing and tries to reconnect with the magic of her childhood. *Greetings from Utopia Park* takes us deep into this complex, unusual world, illuminating its joys and comforts and its disturbing problems. While there is no utopia on earth, Hoffman reveals, there are noble goals worth striving for: believing in belief, inner peace, and a firm understanding that there is a larger fabric of the universe to which we all belong.

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Customer Reviews

Greetings From Utopia Park is one of the best books I've read all year. Claire Hoffman gives a beautiful account of her unusual and fascinating childhood growing up in Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's small meditation community in Fairfield, Iowa. This is such an honest, heartfelt and at times heartbreaking coming of age story and a search for her own truth. As a meditator and someone who has spent my life searching for my own connection to something more, I really identified with this book. Claire Hoffman gives us a front row look at the history of Transcendental Meditation in the 70s in America, and it does not disappoint. 5 stars all the way!

It was surreal to read about my own teenage years in someone else's memoir. I am seven years older so I don't think our paths crossed. At first, I was hesitant to read this book because I thought it would either be too "negative" or sugar-coat the whole experience growing up there. But it was neither-it was a perfect balance. I found myself rolling my eyes along with Claire, laughing hysterically, and then at other times, sobbing remembering things I had forgotten. Thank you for the walk home, down memory lane. Great read!

An intimate view into the bizarre and fascinating TM community established in the Iowa farm belt. The author recounts her personal story of growing up in a culture striving toward enlightenment that goes awry as power and money taints the utopian vision. She poignantly shares the difficulty of her upbringing and heartbreaking family life with just the right balance of humor. It's a nuanced exploration of human yearning to seek fulfillment and the disenchantment they often results as those worthy intentions become institutionalized.

Impossible to put down. Once the story gets under way, you want to know what will happen to Claire and her brother in the alien world their mother drags them to. It's a sensitive and complicated portrait of faith, mystery, and family love. It's also filled with poignant descriptions of growing up that we all can relate to. Highly recommend!

The T.M. movement had a significant impact on millions of Americans and others around the world in the 70's and after, and should have attracted fascination for what it came to be - the birth of a new

religion right before our eyes. That new religion persists; even after Maharishi's death a few years ago, numerous high profile and successful people continue to promote the benefits of meditation, which as a general theme (i.e, not just T.M.) has become much more mainstream in recent years. Nevertheless there is surprisingly little written about the T.M. world which is both objective and knowledgable. Almost everything falls into either the "innie" (devotee) or "outie" (skeptical debunker) category, but neither perspective is accurate. T.M. and the movement surrounding it was neither the glorious solution to all life's problems claimed by Maharishi nor the scam assumed by detractors. The true story is much more complex, as was Maharishi himself. This autobiography by someone who lived their childhood in Fairfield is interesting data towards a history, but it is not that definitive history, just a bit of personal data. The author was obviously deeply affected by her experience - in fact she went on to study and write about religion as an occupation - but she does not seem ever to have fully integrated or entirely digested her own experience, and the book is largely about Hoffman's mother and family rather than T.M. as such. The most interesting episode in the book is the author's decision, later in life and after having found a profession, marriage and personal comfort, to reverse her adolescent rebellion and return to learn further techniques of meditation. Unfortunately the book is unsatisfying in that the whole story seems to have puzzled Ms. Hoffman herself as much as anyone else. She draws no conclusions from her unique childhood. The definitive book about Maharishi and T.M. has yet to be written.

I was eagerly anticipating this book, and was curious what Hoffman's approach would be, in dealing with the vast, and polarizing subject, of the TM movement. I loved that she kept it personal and layered, rather than making a sweeping, final judgement. I found Hoffman's, account to be honest and vivid, I loved being sucked into the dueling, exotic worlds of her childhood-the TM movement, and rural Iowa. But what I enjoyed most was how universal the themes were despite the intensely, specific settings. Many of us analyze and try to come to peace with our pasts. And many of us, as we become parents, try to syphon the best of our childhoods to pass down to our children, while shielding them from the worst.

I really enjoyed this book. I have done a lot of meditating in the past and have always wondered what it would be like to have grown up in a meditation community in kind of an envious way. That sense of depth and wonder and strength that meditation gives- it's such a beautiful gift and being able to share it with the community seems like an amazing experience....and we are all imperfect humans with the junk that we carry around so of course all of that would still show up too. I love the

honesty in this book. It's an easy read and helped me come to terms with my own relationship to meditation.

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