

## I Am Not My Brother's Keeper

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I would like to dedicate this book to my husband for his never-ending support in making my book a reality. And thank you to my two precious children Abbey and Lucas, Abbey who helped me so much and to Lucas for being a good baby and allowing Mummy to write! I also would like to thank four of my life long friends for always keeping after me to write a book: Meredith (mostly), Barb, "Mia" and Vicki.

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"What a day. What a rotten day."

It was drizzling rain and chilly. The locals are used to it, the sudden summer chills of San Francisco that surprise and catch visitors to the region rushing for their sweaters. Almost every morning and afternoon through the months of May, June and July, a foggy, gray soup rushes in from the Pacific Ocean to envelop the northern coastal and valley regions of California. This was one of those days. I suppose it fit the occasion.

I was inside the local Pharmacy store, standing at the wire transfer desk for the third time in a week preparing to send money to my brother, Adam. As I completed the paperwork, I could feel myself getting really angry. Well, outrage is a better way to describe what was happening with me. Bastard! Yes, outrage mixed with stomach churning anxiety threatening to break through the brave, smiley face I was so adept at portraying to my family, friends and what seemed like the entire planet.

Happy, happy Amelia, nothing ever bothers Amelia. Need help; call Amelia! Oh, she may say no sometimes, but she never means it, always gives in, every time; can never say no and really mean it. Just keep at her. After all, she is married to that rich Australian and he is so generous. She can afford to help. They have plenty to spare. She should help. She is family isn't she?

God, I am so tired of giving in to them, especially to Adam and that idiot wife of his, Susan. I have had enough! This is it, the last time! Oh, I know I have said that before, a hundred times, a thousand times probably over the last 10 years. What is the matter with me?

Here I am again and to make matters worse my baby son, Lucas, is sick with a cold and running a fever. I should not have him out in weather like that. It is so unlike me. I never put my children at risk. Never! I may have been a bit overprotective, even with Abbey, my 10-year-old, but that is how it is when you've had as much trouble as I've had getting pregnant. I love my children.

Lucas was an in vitro baby. He only came along after nine, disheartening attempts. But, that's me; I am just that determined. And, I am planning to have a third child even if it takes me until I am 50 to do it.

As I stood there waiting for the receipt, my mind kept running the same old mantra about how all of this came to be, how I allowed myself to be sucked into the vortex of my brother's nightmare. And now, what was once a deep love for baby brother, Adam, was evolving into a poisonous hate.

The poison ran deep. Giving him money was just a symptom of the heartaches he had caused our family.

As I said, I am married to a generous man. Jack had never come right out and said “no” to Adam’s incessant demands.

“We should help if we can,” he would always say to me.

Unfortunately, in those early days neither of us knew what a narcissistic and conniving monster we were dealing with.

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Adam was a cute kid and even though he was eight years younger than me, I loved being with him then. We played games and went for walks. He liked that, and he had a real curiosity. He was very intelligent. That’s what was so shocking; he really could have been whatever he wanted. He could twist me around his finger with just a look. I spoiled him. We all did, probably because he was the only boy.

Ma loved us all, and she was a great mother. Her life was not an easy one. She was a looker, very attractive. Two of my sisters and Adam had a different father than me. Their father was the brother of my father. His name was Steve. I loved him and mostly called him Dad. I was raised by him and my mother. Ma did the best, but somehow she messed up with everyone. She even admitted that, saying to me once, “What have I done? Why do all of my children have problems except for you?” She drives me crazy with the excuses she makes for Adam’s behavior, but that’s her story. He is her only son. Heck, as I said he could play and game me every which way, why not her.

There is quite a story about how I came to have two fathers, about my real Daddy, Bill, and Steve, who I called Dad, and I loved them both. This is one of those stories that, if ever told at all, are usually only whispered surreptitiously within the confines of the family clique.

Ma’s first and only husband, Bill, was my father and the father of my older sister, Margaret. I called him Daddy. When he was in Korea in 1959, and I was just a year-old, he came home on a surprise leave and found my mother in bed with his younger brother. Surprise! Shocking! I cannot remember anything of how the discovery played out at the time, I was too young, but it could not have been pleasant. Mother and Daddy divorced and Uncle Steve(Dad) and my mother got together and had three children, Adam, Michele and Chrissie.

It would be many years before I was to hear the real story of what happened. Ma never told me. I eventually learned the story from one of my aunts and other relatives. There are no signs that Adam, Michele and Chrissie have a different father from Margaret and me. I once talked to a geneticist about it when I was pregnant with Lucas. She said, “Well, the fathers are brothers. The DNA chain would be close.”

Ma treated us all the same, loved us the same and taught us the same manners. She did her best to teach us to love and respect people. By some standards, we might have been judged a poor family, but Ma, because she never married Steve, was able to continue to receive welfare checks. What she was doing was probably illegal because she and Steve were cohabitating, and he was working two or three jobs. We had money, but my parents

just misappropriated it. We had great clothes, took many nice trips and had all the toys imaginable, but the tenement houses and the schools were hardly fun! Other children around us thought we were rich – if only they knew!

I liked having three sisters and a young brother around. We had a lot of fun playing together even though we moved around a lot and lived in houses we never owned. We grew up in the crummy areas of South Boston and Dorchester. I think we may have lived in as many as nine houses, or I should say apartments. When I was 25 I got out of there and followed an ex-boyfriend to San Francisco.

I don't mean to imply that Dorchester was a bad place to grow up. There were a lot of fun things to do, especially in the summer with the beaches of Dorchester Bay. Many a night we would go to Carson Beach or Savin Hill Beach to dig for clams and then take them home to feast. Only a New Englander would eat slimy black clams out of Dorchester Bay, but they tasted great.

I think I was 13 when I had my first kiss on the beach. His name was Ron, and I remember he was older than me, about 15 I think. He had jet black hair and bright blue eyes. I thought he was extremely handsome. I was with two of my girlfriends standing on the water's edge, all of us in our bathing suits trying to look good for a couple of boys from our school who were hanging out and trying to look cool. They eventually came over. Ron was just staring at me with, and I can still see them now, with those beautiful blue eyes and long, dark eyelashes. My heart was beating so fast. I don't remember what he said, but later that afternoon we separated from the others. He kissed me lightly on the lips, and I think I thought I had gone to heaven. The experience still brings a warm glow to my heart. He was a kind person, actually.

South Boston is known for being an Irish Catholic district, some might say enclave, and it has many churches, some of them extraordinary structures built in the 1800s, and church schools. We were Catholics and poor. Amazing how the church could collect money from the poor parishioners and build such huge buildings. I loved going into them. We would go up Dorchester Street to Broadway, which ran all the way to the end of the peninsula to Boston Harbor, and turn down E Street to the magnificent Gate of Heaven Catholic church. Gate of Heaven was my favorite church. The inside was so big and the roof so high, I would feel tiny, tiny. I would save pennies to buy a small candle just so I could light it and place in the votive. Then I would kneel down to pray to the saints and watch the flame flickering along with all the others. It was quite surreal being in such a beautiful place, while close by were the decaying and bug ridden apartments we lived in.

I remember telling Margaret, "No way! No way am I going to live this way for the rest of my life. Crummy houses, crummy schools; I'm going live in my own home, a nice home in a great neighborhood and send my children to private schools, or I'll home school them."

Margaret was sitting on the edge of her bed tying her shoe laces didn't even look up. "You are always going on about what you are going to do. How do you think you can afford to live like the rich? You could find a rich guy and marry him, I suppose."

“I would never, ever do that, Margaret. I can take care of myself; even if I have to work four jobs, I’ll save for what I want, and I’ll have what I want. I’ll go to college and get good jobs.”

Little did I know then that no matter how much I worked at building a life away from the circumstances of my childhood, the lives of my mother and siblings would impact me in a far more dramatic and consequential way than I could have ever thought possible. And, guess what, it would be Adam, the cute little brother, the little guy I adored, born eight years after me, who would innocently re-enter my life and then in a few short years drag me and my family to the edge of the hell he was creating for himself.

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In 1989 I married Jack. He was one of those ruggedly handsome Australians with the charisma that make so many of them such great leading men in Hollywood movies. Errol Flynn, Peter Finch, Mel Gibson, Hugh Jackman, Russell Crowe, Guy Pearce are a few of them. Jack was my Mel Gibson, the swashbuckling hero with the winning smile and an eye for the ladies. He has that Gibson devil-may-care twinkle in his eye along with the same brilliant smile.

In his own way, Jack was as courageous and ambitious as those stars when he came to the United States at 18 to make his mark. It can’t be easy to move from your home country, but Jack has done extremely well and today is a Vice President of one of America’s prestigious and successful companies. I met him in San Francisco at work. He swept me off my feet, and I had no resistance when he asked me to marry him.

The wedding was held in Boston. Jack’s company had moved him to Syracuse a couple of years earlier. Boston wasn’t far away, and I was always going back home for visits and then for planning my wedding. Perfect. Well not quite. Adam was there, and he was...well, being Adam.

The guests were tapping their wine glasses with spoons, a tradition not lost on Jack. He turned and kissed me. “I love you, Amelia.”

“I love you,” I said to my handsome husband, returning the kiss and enjoying the tingling sensation running through my body. Our guests responded enthusiastically with a resounding cheer. As I looked around them, there was Adam, pouting, and Susan sitting next to him wearing a most inappropriate cowgirl outfit with a short skirt.

I saw Adam turn to Susan and say something. In unison, they stood up and then started to walk toward us. I could see Adam was really angry. He scared me. He really did. He reminded me of some kind of gothic deviant.

“We’re out of here,” Adam said. “We’re hungry. You can’t eat any of the fancy crap served up here. This food is for you and your friends, not us. We’re going to Burger King to get some real food. Besides, you wouldn’t allow us to even bring the kids, right?”

“Yes, that’s right. As much as I love all my nieces and nephews, none of them were invited. I didn’t want children here. I wanted a strictly adult wedding. Now, I know you don’t like that, but you did exactly what you wanted for your wedding.”

“How could you know? You weren’t even there.”

“And you know why. I’ve said sorry a thousand times. It’s time you let it go,” I said. Jack put his hand on my arm.

“C’mon, Adam, this is your sister’s wedding day. Now, if it’s your intention to upset her, then it is best you and Susan leave now and go enjoy your Burger King banquet.”

Adam never liked Jack, said he was arrogant, but he was wary of him. Talk about calling the kettle black. I could see how he was struggling to keep from screaming obscenities at my Prince Charming, like he did at me many times over. Jack looked the kind of man who could handle himself and, as the future was to prove, Adam was very much aware that my husband was very smart and likely to be making a lot of money. And he did!

It wasn’t long after our marriage when Adam called and asked us to co-sign a loan he wanted to take out, a very big loan of \$125,000.

“No way, Adam, we don’t have the money. For God’s sake, we don’t own our own property or home yet!”

I assumed that would be the end of it, but I had no idea of his ability to wear people down. Yes, he was pushy and aggressive, but this was my first experience at seeing how pushy he had become.

For the next two and a half months, he called every day, sometimes two and three times a day. I was at college full time, so by the time I arrived home it would be late afternoon. That’s when he would always call. It got to the point that I did not want to answer the phone.

“Did you think about it, Amelia? Did you talk to Jack? You know, this isn’t what you would call a traditional co-sign deal. This is different. There’s no risk in it for you. I can make the payments.”

“C’mon, give me a break! I didn’t fall off the turnip truck yesterday, Adam, there’s only one type of co-sign. You don’t pay; I have to pay. It falls on me and Jack.”

“No, this is different.”

“Don’t try to lay that crap on me. The answer is for the last and final time, no! We can’t anyway. I’ve told you before, we don’t have the money.”

“You can’t or you won’t?” he screamed.

“Interpret it anyway you want. We are not going to do it, and that’s the end of it!”

He had nerve I had to give him that! Little did I know this was just the beginning? I should have been more aggressive and not let it go on for 2-1/2 months. Who am I kidding? I could never be that way with him. Saying no to him this time would turn out to be a short-lived breakthrough.

‘I could never be that way with him!’ Oh! There was the clue, in the language. His power over me, I could hardly ever say no to him and mean it. The pathology of my behavior seems obvious now, but it wasn’t at the time. Despite a degree in psychology, it would take years to see how it applied to me.

That was the first time he ever asked for so much, and the first time I said no and meant it. But, he was always asking. Demanding really, money and help, as if he was entitled to

whatever he wanted. He once said he was God, and he was not being flippant. I kept giving in to the smaller requests and demands.

“He’s my brother and that’s what families are supposed to do, help,” I kept telling myself.

I was eight when he was born. I loved him a lot, but he was extremely spoiled. We would take walks, especially in the fall and jump in the leaves together. I really did enjoy those times. One of the best times I recall was the blizzard of 1978. We walked in snow that came up to his chest and crossed over the reservoir with me holding his hand and doing my best to forge a path for him.

As he got older, he became condescending and judgmental. He did not care whose feelings he hurt. When he was 15, I moved to San Francisco. I didn’t see much of him after that, but when I came home to visit I would occasionally go out to a movie or have lunch with him. For the most part I had a good time, but not always.

It was my birthday. Adam had won tickets to a Joan Jett concert, so he took me. It was a beautiful night. I was in a good mood, happy to be hanging out with my brother and happy to be home with my family and friends. The place was crowded, people everywhere, excited, waiting for the concert to start. Then it happened. Some guy stepped on my foot, accidentally.

“Ouch!” I yelled and grabbed my foot.

Adam went ballistic. “What’s up with you, buddy! You step on my sister’s foot, and do I hear a sorry, an excuse me, or an ‘are you okay?’ No!” He screamed, threatening and taunting the poor guy.

Then I saw Adam had a knife on his belt. I could not believe it! What was he doing with a knife? That freaked me out! I was really scared then. The guy who stepped on my foot was clearly ready to take Adam on. I knew that something really bad was going to happen. I forgot about my foot. I had to act and quickly. I stepped in front of Adam.

“Cut it out, Adam!” I yelled. “I’m not hurt. It’s no big deal.”

Adam was crazed and for a moment I thought he was going to attack me. “What is the matter with you? don’t you get it? It was an accident. Now, for God’s sake cut it out!”

Adam lowered his eyes and adopted what had become part of his defense, his belligerent pout. “I was looking out for you.”

I apologized to the guy, and he moved on, thank God.

Later, when I asked Adam why he had a knife, he said nothing and told me it was none of my business.

“You know, Adam, you used to be cute once. I don’t know what is going on with you now, but you’ve developed a huge chip on your shoulder. You better get over it, or your life is going nowhere.” How prophetic these words would turn out to be.

What I said had as much meaning to him as water running off a duck’s back. His behavior only got worse. He got meaner, nastier and more threatening. I couldn’t figure it out. Maybe his behavior at the concert, in his own demented way, was that he liked the

idea of family and was being protective of me. Indeed, he was to have seven children of his own, but paradoxically a story was to emerge of such hellish abuse of his children that I, in all conscience could not ignore it, and I got involved. Silly me, but I had no way of knowing of the consequences that would profoundly affect my life and the lives of my family.

Our dealings with one another after the concert were minimal for many years.

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In 1987, Adam married Susan. He was only 21. She was just a few years younger than I am, so that put her age at around 25.

They met at a Pharmacy store where they were both working. Adam had been seriously involved with another young woman, Donna. I had already moved away from home, so I did not get to know her that well, but the rest of the family liked her. Adam was tall and very handsome. Women certainly took notice when he was around. Then suddenly, it was Susan and marriage. It turned out she was three month's pregnant at the time.

The kindest way I can describe my relationship with Susan is that we were never close. She is the antithesis of me. To look at, she reminds me of a tiny rodent, and if she ever speaks her voice has the pinched quality of a squeaking mouse. We rarely shared conversations. Well, except when I helped her move from hotel to hotel and to pay for things. She was attractive, but thin, very thin, much thinner than I, and I'm about 105 pounds.

What is surprising is the way Adam is with Susan. Unlike how he controls and treats everyone else, he would do anything for her, anything. It is I who he would call a stupid idiot. He would never speak to Susan like that, ever.

Ma said, "Oh, Adam and Susan together; it's a match made in heaven. They are so much in love."

"C'mon, Ma, get real. A match made in hell is more like it," I wanted to say.

What really got to me was the way they treated their children. They were never fed, clothed, sheltered or schooled properly. They were not even taught the rudimentary necessities of personal hygiene. A litany of charges, court appearances, jail sentences and flights from the law were to become the core features of Adam and Susan's macabre trek through life. Susan was hopeless as a mother. She would never defend her children over him, ever, ever. They would reach out to her for affection, but she would never respond.

As said earlier, I didn't make it to their wedding. I tried to explain why. Adam couldn't care less. It was a personal affront to him and Susan. He carried a grudge about it for his whole life. He was not disappointed or upset; he was angry, mad angry.

I met their first child, my niece, Cindy, when she was born. What an exciting occasion that was for me. I love children. My own, Lucas and Abbey, are everything to me.

I didn't see Cindy again until she was almost a year old. Adam and Susan came to visit Jack and me in Syracuse. It was weird, really weird. Why would I expect anything different? Hope springs eternal is a common saying, isn't it? God, I call it me being naive, or as Jack would say when he was being very Australian, "Bloody naive."

Cindy was pretty much confined to her playpen most of the day and night I was to find out, poor little thing. When we first got there and I reached down to pick her up and give her a hug, Adam stopped me short.

“Don’t do that,” he snapped. “And always ask us first if it’s okay.”

“What are you talking about? We haven’t seen our niece in nearly a year, and you’re telling me I can’t pick her up unless I ask first. What’s the problem?”

I was to find out that asking made no difference. When I did, they usually said no anyway.

“She’s not used to people,” Adam replied sharply.

“Dear God, how on earth can she ever be used to people, if you don’t let us touch her?”

Jack knew I was getting upset. “Oh, Susan, we wouldn’t want to spoil the child and have her turn out a brat like some people we know, would we?” Jack said looking right at Susan and ignoring Adam.

Jack could be so Australian at times. Later that night in bed we talked, or rather whispered about how ‘fucked up,’ Jack’s words, was the way Adam and Susan were raising Cindy.

“They won’t let her do anything. We’re walking on eggshells in our own apartment! And, Susan is pregnant again. Why, Jack? They don’t even like the one they already have.”

“Your brother has never taken responsibility for his life, and he sure as hell is not about to start. There are more kids to come and a whole lot more crap is going to come with them, Amelia.”

Prophetic words from the man I loved so deeply. We made love, conscious to adjust from our usually robust and noisy romping.

When Adam and Susan left our apartment a few days later, I was relieved, but sad for the life I knew was coming at my little niece, Cindy.

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Adam was soon asking for larger amounts of money. He said needed fourteen hundred dollars urgently, told us his tax refund was due, and that he could pay us back as soon as the tax check arrived in the mail.

I had just had Abbey. “Look, we have a brand-new baby; I can’t afford to give you a cent.”

Well, we did end up giving him the money and, unbelievably, he paid it back. It was to be the one and only time.

There was more, of course. The biggest amount we actually loaned was when Abbey was two. We had just bought and moved into our first home, so we had a lot going on. Would that deter dear brother Adam? Of course not!

Adam and Susan had bought a little house in Maine for something like \$36,000. It was cheap and it needed a lot of work, but it was the first house they bought, and Jack and I were happy for them. They were only in it for eight months when Adam called.

“We owe five thousand dollars in back mortgages.”

Jack said we would sign a tax refund check we had just received over to Adam. The check was made out for six thousand dollars, more than was asked for, but it was the full amount of the back mortgages. Buying the house was the first decent thing Adam had ever done, and we didn't want them to lose it.

“You'll never see the money, Amelia, so don't even worry about it.” Jack is a wonderful man. As I said earlier, he was generous to a fault. He had already said to me that if we were in a similar situation, he would hope family would help us out. That's not very likely, I thought.

They sent us a thank you note, which was a pleasant surprise. Perhaps they were turning a corner. Hope springs eternal! No way! What came next blew any vestige of hope I had left for them right out of the water. They lost the house! Adam came up with some fiction that the bank manager told him that he would accept two thousand dollars toward the back mortgage.

“Two thousand! We gave you 6,000 to pay the lot. What's this about two thousand? Where is the other 4,000?”

“A business opportunity came up that would put us right back on our feet.”

“A business opportunity! What business opportunity? We gave you money, our hard earned money so you and your family would have a house to live in.”

“The bank manager let us down. He said the \$2,000 would keep us in the house...”

“What! Well, what happened? What happened to the \$2,000? Haven't you spoken to the bank manager?”

“You're not going to believe this, but he died and the bank couldn't find the documents.”

“You've got to be kidding me! You have signed copies of the documents, don't you?”

“Oh, hang on, I remember. It was a handshake deal, so I could get the business deal done.”

“You liar, you rotten liar, Adam! Go to hell!” I slammed down the phone. I was in tears, desperately disappointed, our money just thrown away.

Of course, there was no bank manager who said he would accept two thousand dollars. There was no bank manager who died. We found out later that they used all the money we gave them to buy cheap merchandise and rent a warehouse. They would buy salvaged goods damaged in a fire, or water damaged and try to resell them cheap. He spent all the money on that, nothing went to the house, nothing!

So, here was Adam and Susan with four children, with nowhere to live and no money. I knew that Adam and his family were in for a tough time, but I could not know how horrific and bizarre their story was to become, or how deeply my life and my family's lives would be affected.

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I liked living in Syracuse. I was able to go home to New England on a regular basis to see my family and friends. Despite saying I didn't want to see Adam again, I did drop in to visit several times when I was in Boston.

Adam's attitude never altered. He was always rude and condescending to me. Every time I reflect on those visits, I get angry with myself for allowing the bastard (pardon my language, but right now as I write this I am angry, and I actually yelled the word out anyway, so why not write it down here?) to abuse and humiliate me! I let him get away with it all the time and kept coming back for more. Is that crazy or what? I have heard it said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and each time expecting a different result.

I had not seen Cindy in five months, which was the last time Adam and Susan came to Syracuse. So, while we were back east, Jack was with me, we visited with them. Adam let us in to the house.

"What's going on, Adam?" Jack asked, as I kissed my brother's cheek.

"Usual crap," he replied as he led us into the kitchen where Susan was leaning back against the sink.

Chewing gum and looking hot and sweaty, Susan tried to smile as she opened her mouth to squeak, "Hello, Jack. Hello Amelia."

"You're late. We thought you weren't coming," said Adam.

"Yeah, I can see that. Looks like you were in the middle of cooking something hot, hey, Susan?" said Jack.

"You don't have to be crass. I thought you might have taught Jack some American etiquette by now, Amelia."

"Jeez, Brother Adam, lighten up," said Jack.

"Where's Cindy, Susan? I would love to see her. It's been five months."

"She's upstairs, sleeping. She's not to be disturbed," said Adam.

"Well, I'll wait until she wakes up," I said.

"She won't wake up until supper time."

"All right then, we'll wait," said Jack knowing how disappointed I'd be if I did not see her. "What's for supper?"

Susan looked at Adam. "I don't have anything for all of us," she said.

"No problem. We can get a pizza and bring it back here to eat; enough for all of us, our treat." Jack grinned, enjoying Susan and Adam's discomfort, who we could tell would rather not have us around for supper. "Amelia's here to see Cindy, and so she shall. C'mon, Adam lets go get the pizza."

Adam left reluctantly with Jack. Susan, who rarely had anything to say to me suddenly found the need to attend to some laundry. As was her usual style, she didn't bother to ask if I wanted something to drink, so I took the liberty of going to the refrigerator. In no way was it a surprise to me, the refrigerator had plenty of food in it for them.

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