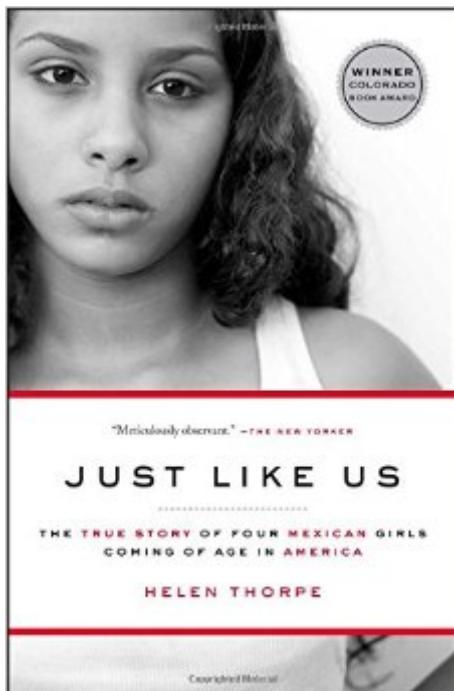


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Just Like Us: The True Story Of Four Mexican Girls Coming Of Age In America



Synopsis

Now updated, the powerful account of four young Mexican women coming of age in Denver, two who have legal documentation, two who don't, and what happens to them as a result. Just Like Us tells the story of four high school students whose parents entered this country illegally from Mexico. We meet the girls on the eve of their senior prom in Denver, Colorado. All four of the girls have grown up in the United States, and all four want to live the American dream, but only two have documents. As the girls attempt to make it into college, they discover that only the legal pair sees a clear path forward. Their friendships start to divide along lines of immigration status. Then the political firestorm begins. A Mexican immigrant shoots and kills a police officer. The author happens to be married to the Mayor of Denver, a businessman who made his fortune in the restaurant business. In a bizarre twist, the murderer works at one of the Mayor's restaurants "under a fake Social Security number. A local Congressman seizes upon the murder as proof of all that is wrong with American society and Colorado becomes the place where national arguments over immigration rage most fiercely. The rest of the girls' lives play out against this backdrop of intense debate over whether they have any right to live here. Just Like Us is a coming-of-age story about girlhood and friendship, as well as the resilience required to transcend poverty. It is also a book about identity "what it means to steal an identity, what it means to have a public identity, what it means to inherit an identity from parents. The girls, their families, and the critics who object to their presence allow the reader to watch one of the most complicated social issues of our times unfurl in a major American city. And the perspective of the author gives the reader insight into both the most powerful and the most vulnerable members of American society as they grapple with the same dilemma: Who gets to live in America? And what happens when we don't agree?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Four Mexican girls, two legal immigrants born in the United States, and two illegals born in Mexico with legal siblings born in the US, grew up as best friends in junior high and high school. Just Like Us reads like a detective novel as Helen Thorpe shows how they cope with these similarities and differences--how they manage to get real or fake IDs, drivers' licenses, jobs, and college financial aid--all the while dealing with deported parents, boyfriends, and peer pressure. Finally, when an illegal immigrant teenager murders a Denver police officer, additional obstacles emerge to thwart their happy friendships as their differences become even more evident. As Thorpe, wife of Denver's mayor, relates, "All of us found ourselves in new territory, far from our point of origin. I didn't know what the rules were anymore." Through reading this book, I learned to care about how these girls survived the conflicting laws in the US that seemed, for the most part, to prevent them from achieving the American dream. Thorpe relates to their dilemmas, having been an immigrant herself. She documents how their fiercest opponent, Tom Tancredo, himself offspring of immigrant grandparents, tries to gain political capital by blocking illegal immigrants from receiving decent educational programs, health care, and respect. At the same time, the Mexican immigrants--both legal and illegal--must pick fruit and vegetables, clean dirty buildings, and remodel other wealthy citizens' houses in order to survive. As Thorpe weaves these girls' lives through the events swirling around them, I found myself staying up late to read one more chapter, or two, or three before going to sleep.

I especially wanted to read this book because I am an ESL teacher and I live in Denver. The author tells the story of four young Mexican American women who are good friends. It is their story but it is much more. It is the story of illegal immigrants and the many businesses who hire them, sometimes knowing that their documents are fake. It is the story of parent who are in the United States illegally and their children who are born here. It is the conflicting story of high school students who work hard and dream of going to college despite the obstacles some of them will face. We meet them in their senior year. All are good students; two are legal and two are not. All four want to attend college, but the two without papers have problems figuring out how to pay for tuition without access to in-state tuition rates and financial aid. Thorpe describes the many dimensions of their lives, their academic experiences, their jobs, their families and their social lives. Helen Thorpe also brings in the relevant

political issues concerning immigration. She interviews Tom Tancredo, a former Colorado Congressman who has strong opinions about illegal immigration. Thorpe also describes various national votes and proposals and how they affect the girls and the possibilities for their futures in the United States. Denver has many immigrants from many countries, but when the subject of immigrants comes up, many people think of Mexicans. And, even though Americans of Mexican descent share Colorado's history for generations, many people think of Mexicans as illegal. Thorpe, as the Denver mayor's wife, is brought into the details of the shooting death of an off-duty policeman, working at a Mexican social club.

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