



AND  
NOW  
I SPILL  
THE  
FAMILY  
SECRETS

an  
*Illustrated  
Memoir*

MARGARET  
KIMBALL

BOOK  
CLUB  
KIT

## A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

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Dear Reader,

Although I didn't realize it at the time, this book began in the summer of 2003 when my older brother Ted called and told me that our mother had tried to hang herself when we were kids. It was a secret my parents had kept for fifteen years.

After that phone call, I began writing about my mother's bipolar disorder and its impact on our lives. It took me another fifteen years to unearth all of the details I needed to tell this story. During that time, I collected documents, interviewed family members, researched public records, read through old diaries, and amassed an archive that became the foundation for this book.

After I'd written the book, someone asked if it needed to be illustrated. For as long as I can remember I've combined words and pictures. It's my way of thinking. More importantly, though, I wanted readers to be fully immersed in the spaces where I grew up. Each page contains full-page panels that allow the reader to enter into our old environments, to fully understand how we lived, where, and what it looked like.

*And Now I Spill the Family Secrets* is a book that I wish existed when I was growing up. If the mental illness in our family had been out in the open, something we were able to discuss, I likely never would've needed to write about it. Instead, this book is an investigation into thirty years—and longer—of secrets my family kept about our past. And the book ends with what it all might mean for our future.

Thank you so much for reading this book,  
Margaret

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. As a child, Margaret was surrounded by adults who wanted to help, from her second-grade teacher to a school therapist. Even her mother had said, “Ask me anything.” But Margaret didn’t know what to ask. What would have been more helpful for Margaret when she was growing up?
2. This is a coming-of-age story. What are the turning points in Margaret’s life that helped her grow up, for better or worse?
3. What do the illustrations contribute to—or detract from—the main story?
4. Margaret writes, “Mental illness defies logic. That was and probably still is the limitation of my pattern-seeking brain, a mind that wants a clear story.” Do you agree that mental illness defies logic? What are the benefits and limits of a “clear story”?
5. Perhaps more than a “clear story,” Margaret wants to directly say what happened. With mental illness, there is so much stigma that this often can feel impossible. Why is it important to directly talk about events in our lives? What are the implications for your family relationships of simply saying what happened?
6. While living in the blue house, Janice hides something from the family. Margaret writes that “the secret itself is the affront,” not the contents of whatever’s hidden. Do you agree? How does a secret transform the relationships in a family? Is there a difference between a parent hiding something and a stepparent hiding something?
7. Did your family ever keep a secret (or secrets) for years, only to come out later? What happened when everyone found out? How did your relationships change or grow in the aftermath? How do you talk about the secret now, or do you?
8. Margaret talks about grief transforming over generations. How is grief passed down? How does it change over time? Is there a way to disinherit grief?
9. How does Margaret’s relationship change with her brother Ted over time? What were the turning points? How has your relationship with your siblings changed over time?
10. Margaret mentions that she does not want to write about Ted but doesn’t know how else to process what he tells her. What are the risks in writing about him? Are there things you don’t want to write or talk about but can’t avoid?

# FROM THE ARCHIVE

