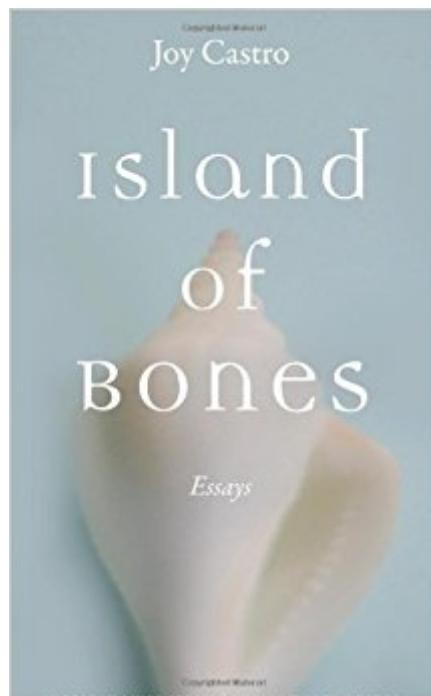


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# Island Of Bones: Essays (American Lives)



## Synopsis

What is “identity” when you’re a girl adopted as an infant by a Cuban American family of Jehovah’s Witnesses? The answer isn’t easy. You won’t find it in books. And you certainly won’t find it in the neighborhood. This is just the beginning of Joy Castro’s unmoored life of searching and striving that she’s turned to account with literary alchemy in *Island of Bones*. In personal essays that plumb the depths of not-belonging, Castro takes the all-too-raw materials of her adolescence and young adulthood and views them through the prism of time. The result is an exquisitely rendered, richly detailed perspective on a uniquely troubled young life that reflects on the larger questions each of us faces in a world where diversity and singularity are forever at odds. In the experiences of her past—hunger and abuse, flight as a fourteen-year-old runaway, single motherhood, the revelations of her “true” ethnic identity, the suicide of her father—Castro finds the “jagged, smashed place of edges and fragments” that she pieces together to create an island all her own. Hers is a complicated but very real depiction of what it is to “jump class, to not belong but to find one’s voice in the interstices of identity.”

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Memoir and argument come together in these essays, and the mix is angry, wry, sad, and always

so honest, smashing stereotypes from all sides. The biography is dramatic. Adopted at birth by a Jehovah's Witness family, abused by her stepfather, the scholarly kid was the only Latina in her West Virginia high school. Growing up in trailer park, barrio, and rural towns, she came to college hungry: literally for food, but also for books. She doesn't fit, doesn't know the rules, "and that's okay." Now she teaches English and ethnic studies at the University of Nebraska. Writing, she says, is "mysterious. Urgent. Magical. Free." There is some repetition, but with great quotes from Sandra Cisneros, Virginia Woolf, Frida Kahlo, Toni Morrison, and more, Castro follows in their tradition with her own sharp commentary, and readers will quote her eagerly. "Jumping class comes at a price, and the price is not belonging." There is no slick relativism here; she addresses feminist issues directly and honors work, political commitment, community, and creativity. --Hazel Rochman

"With undeniably strong prose, Castro is equally uncompromising in her anger, intelligence, empathy, and confusion, each essay turning and enriching the one before without repetition or break in rhythm." •Publishers Weekly Starred Review (Publishers Weekly)"Throughout her life, Castro has had to redefine her identity, both to herself and to others. These powerful transformations form the backbone of this slim volume of visceral pieces." •Kirkus (Kirkus)"The essays in Island of Bones piece together an inspiring journey that challenges assumptions, statistics and long-held beliefs that shape the "public narrative" of a U.S. Latina. Indeed, through lives like Castro's, the public narrative expands to include stories of strength, perseverance and, apropos of the author's name, joy." •Rigoberto González, El Paso Times (Rigoberto González El Paso Times 2012-09-16)"Written with poetic precision, this small book lives large in memory." •Heather Seggel, ForeWord Reviews (Heather Seggel ForeWord Reviews)"Each essay in Joy Castro's Island of Bones stands alone yet lends context to the next. By the last page, you're tempted to start reading again, the better to appreciate Castro's careful array of "small fragile bones" of memory, insight and cultural history gathered in the course of a complex life." •Peg Sheldrick, Lincoln Journal Star (Peg Sheldrick Lincoln Journal Star 2012-10-09)"[Castro's] book invites us to think not just about who we are, but also about how our deepest aspirations can be more powerful than the boundaries and definitions we impose upon ourselves and others." •Pamela Miller, Star Tribune (Pamela Miller Star Tribune 2012-10-20)

Book arrived in nice condition.

I had to counteract the rather strange 3-star review above from someone who said they hadn't even read this book before submitting the review. I've actually read the book -- as I have all of Joy Castro's books. She is a great writer whose work appeals to both other writers (who can admire -- and learn from -- her lyric and richly detailed prose) and general readers (who will learn and discover something of worth in each of her essays or books). This essay collection examines many of the issues Castro has faced in her own life -- stereotypes about Latina women, sexual abuse, poverty, hard work, literary achievement, marriage, and motherhood. I always find her perspective interesting and worthwhile, and because her essays are relatively short in length I found it easy to read this book from cover to cover without ever feeling bored. Castro makes her social, political, and personal points in a targeted, careful, well-thought out way, and her prose is always something to enjoy.

Island of Bones is a beautifully poetic collection of treatises from the life of Joy Castro. She introduces us to some unknown facts regarding Latin heritage, which she covered so eloquently and made so interesting I wondered why I didn't already know any of it. Raised surprisingly in the Jehovah Witness faith, I found her insights into JW and its oppression of females absolutely riveting. She shines a unique light on the heartbreak of divorce from a young girl's perspective that burn with intensity. She portrays varying degrees of anxiety and horror of living with her mother's second husband, which had me holding my breath. My heart ached! Joy shares her disappointments with such vividness, as a camera rolling, collecting and revealing disturbing nuances. Castro's beautiful voice concisely suggests, in an understated way, the larger picture with a few intimating details that will haunt you long after you lay this book aside. In Theory is one of the most startling essays I've read in a long time. I wept while reading the events that were possible in the heart of a creosote bush. She is not the voice of every woman, but the voice of so many women who live with the dog of doubt growling at their heels. It is inspirational how she turned so many broken moments into a beautiful mosaic of essays. What I enjoyed most about her writing, is how similar I feel to her, how she and I could have been neighbors, or girlfriends talking over the fence or over coffee. Her thoughtful turns of phrase are like diamonds plucked from the ravaged earth. Her ability to share the bizarre details of her life, allow me to realistically look at the bizarre details of mine. How many women carry a secret shame? While the particulars may not be the same, the burden to carry it in secrecy are identical. It can destroy you or motivate you. It is clear which on which road Joy Castro

travels. If you enjoy memoirs and or essays, I strongly encourage you to take a look at Joy Castro's *Island of Bones*.

I originally found Joy Castro in another anthology after reading her essay "Farm Use" which cuts straight to the bone. (It's reprinted here in this collection.) From there I sought out her memoir "The Truth Book" which fulfilled the promise of that essay. Then when I saw this book of essays at my university library, I knew I had to read it. I was afraid the book might be too academic, but the essays aren't that at all. Joy Castro is a down-to-earth accessible academic, a rare creature these days. These are short and compelling memoir essays about being a woman whose identity crosses many boundaries. This book covers so many topics, child abuse, motherhood, poverty, becoming educated, adoption, birth parents, suicide. After reading this book, I searched out her blog, and discovered she'd written two novels. Guess what I'll be reading next?

Joy Castro captures some of the heart wrenching parts of growing up. Most of this book doesn't read like collected essays - instead the pieces blend together and tell a story about identity and adulthood. The comparison's between the author's life growing up and life at the university are startling and wonderful. Heartfelt and insightful this is a short, wonderful collection of essays.

Low score on this book as I have not read it yet. The description when reviewing the book before purchase seemed like it would be a good book. I belong to a book club and we read a wide range of books so I plan on bringing this one to their attention to read during the busy months of the holidays when there doesn't seem to be enough time for anything let alone reading a long book.

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