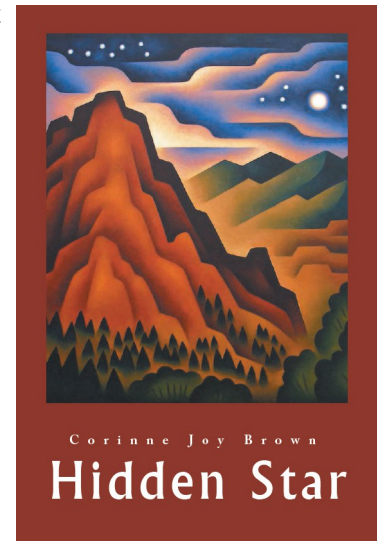


By Susan Alt Johnson

I just finished reading *Hidden Star*. I raced through it; I could hardly put it down. Very readable. Good story (stories, actually!), well told.

Now, in the interest of full disclosure: Corinne Brown is a friend of mine. So I'm biased. But I'm a retired professional writer/editor/publisher and a fiction hound; in my (advanced) years I've read the good, the bad and the ugly. I'd give Corinne's *Hidden Star* a rating of 8.5 out of 10. Coming from me, that's high praise!

In short, this is a wonderful tale of hidden Jewish pasts for many descendants of the Spanish and Portuguese Catholics who settled in Central & North America after escaping the 15th and 16th Century persecutions of the Spanish Inquisition. These people were forced to convert to Catholicism (and became known in The New World as conversos), but secretly maintained some Jewish rituals and customs long beyond the time when their descendants even knew from whence their rituals and habits derived.



*Hidden Star* is a fast read—exactly the right length for a work of fiction with historical-novel underpinnings—and has excellent character development. It is full of historical information unavailable elsewhere, woven into the fabric of this gripping story. The novel conveys an excellent feel for the many cultures that coalesce in Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. I'm ready to leave tomorrow to drive to Santa Fe to re-explore the High Road leading to Taos, NM and Pueblo, CO.

Best of all, to Corinne's great credit, this is a novel that appeals to everyone from age 10 to age 100, men and women alike, and is sure to make readers want to delve further into the "hidden" aspects of their immigrant families' backgrounds. She taps into a feeling many of us experience in our lives—a mysterious upwelling of deep emotional connection as we encounter individuals and rituals from other religions and cultures. So often, we feel a deep belief that somehow our past is connected to these very events and people. That somehow, in some way, our ancestors from many generations past have brought us into this 'circle' of memory, of life.

Catholics who think they have European Jewish ancestors will be fascinated by this story. Yes, Corinne has identified an important element of who we are—our pasts make us better, make us who we are. And we are all the result of twisted paths of experience. These twisted ancestral paths have become part of our DNA; it's an adventure to discover them, as Rachel Ortega and Jose Flores learn in the midst of their growing love for each other during a gripping family crisis involving Rachel's two young runaway sons, Angel and Juan.

I loved Father Nunez and Jose's mother, Rosa, and the warmth they exuded during the search for the boys. Joaquim and Malka, conspiring to leave Amsterdam in 1671, added to my understanding of our ancestors' yearning to emigrate to The New World. Frank Yazzi, a Dine Indian, is a fascinating character. In Corinne's novel I've encountered a whole new world, too, that of crypto-Jews (crypto simply means hidden). Now that I've made this discovery, I'll go much farther with this line of investigation in my own life!