

# SUMMARY

## *SMALL FRY*

LISA BRENNAN-JOBS



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# **Summary of “Small Fry” by Lisa Brennan-Jobs**

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Small Fry (2018) is a touching look at the life of  
Steve Jobs’ daughter

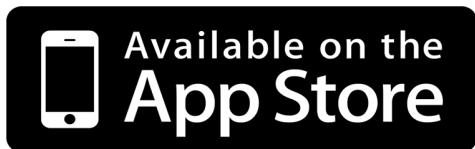


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# Introduction

What do you remember about your dad? Unless you're Lisa Brennan-Jobs, your memories probably don't include the fact that your dad was the founder of Apple! But that doesn't mean Lisa's memories are all warm and fuzzy. Although being the daughter of Steve Jobs might sound pretty awesome on the surface, the truth is that Lisa's experience wasn't quite as star-studded as you might think. In fact, her childhood was far from luxurious and it definitely wasn't filled with free iPads and trips to Disney World. So, through the course of this summary, we'll go beyond our assumptions and take an in-depth look at a story that paints Steve Jobs in a much different light. We'll learn who he was when he was out of the spotlight and how he was every bit as fallible as every other human being.

# Steve Jobs' First Child Was Neither Planned Nor Wanted

That might sound like a pretty harsh chapter title; it's definitely something no kid wants to hear about their conception. But unfortunately, that fact was thrown in Lisa Brennan-Jobs' face pretty much every day of her life. Because although her parents were high-school sweethearts, their story didn't turn out like the fairytale romances that are often portrayed in wholesome teenage films. However, things started out happily enough during the spring semester of 1972, when Steve Jobs was a senior in high-school and he fell for Chrisann Brennan, who was a junior at the time. During those days, they shared a mutual love of technology; Steve was into computers while Chrisann's after-school activities centered around a claymation film she was making with her friends.

In those days, Steve reverentially held candles for Chrisann when the light outside was fading between takes; as twilight fell, she drew the art for the movie's next scene while cuddled close to him. And as they spent more time together and Steve learned of Chrisann's dangerous home-life with an abusive schizophrenic mother, it's unsurprising that their relationship became more than just a tender high-school romance; for Chrisann, it also became an escape. The summer after graduation, Steve and Chrisann moved in together, creating a new home for themselves in a small cabin before Steve left for college in the fall.

This ultimately marked the turning point where their paths would diverge. For when Steve went to college, Chrisann stayed behind. And even though Steve dropped out after only a year and a half, the two found that they already had separate lives and neither seemed to mind too much when Chrisann started dating somebody else without so much as telling Steve. Later, however, Steve revealed that he had actually been deeply hurt by the breakup, even though he'd refused to show it at the time. And with two years of time and this new revelation between them, the two decided to take another shot at a relationship. By this time, things were a little different;

although Steve had dropped out of college, he had built a fledgling start-up called Apple with his buddy Steve Wozniak. So, while Steve forged ahead with running his new company, he got Chrisann a job in their packing department. On the surface, life seemed pretty good.

But Chrisann grew increasingly dissatisfied as time passed. Steve wasn't overly affectionate and he grew more temperamental by the day. Worn out from dealing with his mood swings, Chrisann was writing tactful breakup speeches in her head when a discovery stopped her dead in her tracks: she was pregnant with Steve's baby. Despite taking all the right precautions, her IUD had stopped working and she'd had no idea. When she tentatively approached Steve with the news and the confession that she had no idea what to do, his reaction was every girl's worst nightmare: he yelled at her and ran from the room.

## “That’s Not my Kid”

Although these chapter titles might seem to be getting meaner and meaner, sadly, this too is a direct quote from Steve Jobs and one that was also frequently repeated to Lisa while she was growing up. Although Chrisann knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that her baby could only belong to Steve, her now ex-boyfriend repeatedly denied it, even going so far as to demand a paternity test later on. Ironically, however, despite his denial-- and his adamant refusal to provide Chrisann with any financial support for their child-- Steve not only visited his newborn daughter in the hospital, he helped Chrisann choose her name.

But his involvement pretty much ended there, until Chrisann-- desperate, alone, and barely scraping by on odd jobs and welfare-- sued Steve in an effort to get child support. But even then, Steve fought every step of the way, denying the results of the paternity test (even when they conclusively proved that Lisa was his child) and refusing direct orders from the court outright. He fought relentlessly, that is, until one day-- after the lawsuit had dragged on for months-- he suddenly gave in and not only agreed to pay child support, but to pay more than he had originally been asked! Chrisann was baffled until four days after the case came to an end and she saw the headlines in the papers: Apple was now an international success and Steve Jobs was worth more than two million dollars.

Suddenly, his true motives became painfully clear. What Chrisann had hoped to be an act of kindness or an attack of conscience was, in fact, far from altruistic. So far from nurturing a genuine desire to help them and repent his mistakes, Steve simply wanted them out of the way. To him, Chrisann and Lisa were nothing more than loose ends to tie up, blots on the record of his life that he wanted to erase. It was much later before Lisa learned just how true this was; long after her father’s death, she was told that Steve kept a picture of her in his wallet and showed it around at parties. Still denying paternity even then, he told friends, “She isn’t my kid, but she doesn’t have a dad, so I’m trying to be there for her.”



## Lisa Idolized Her Father

But of course, nothing could be further from the truth. No matter what Steve told people at parties, he was never there for Lisa as a child. Except in the form of child support payments, Lisa had no connection with her father, and sadly, this only caused her to build fond daydreams of him in her head. In fact, the author recalls that, as a child, she often proudly told classmates, “My father is Steve Jobs!” Although he wasn’t yet the household name we know today and this declaration was frequently met with, “Who?” little Lisa was still so proud of his accomplishments. She was so proud, in fact, that she even disclosed her father’s identity under great pressure to keep it hidden; Chrisann had been warned that Steve’s international acclaim might lead to death threats or Lisa getting kidnapped.

But while nothing quite that serious ever came to pass, Lisa’s relationship with her mother quickly deteriorated through no fault of her own. Because although Chrisann loved her daughter-- arguably more than Steve Jobs ever did-- that didn’t stop her from feeling as though life had dealt her a raw deal. Resentful of the fact that she was permanently living paycheck to paycheck and caring for a child on her own with no support and no family or friends, Chrisann frequently blamed Lisa for everything she didn’t like about her life. During her particularly dark mood swings, she would yell at Lisa, throw things at her, and-- among other things-- scream that giving birth to her was a mistake and that Lisa had ruined her life. Their tempestuous relationship continued in that fashion, alternating between moments of intense affection and hatred, until Lisa was thirteen. By that time, the situation had become untenable and social services got involved, reaching out to Steve to let him know that if he didn’t take Lisa, she would be forced to live in a foster home.

## Not Really Part of This Family

Although the circumstances which precipitated her change in fortune were hardly ideal, Lisa didn't really mind. Living with her father, she thought, would be her very own Cinderella moment; one magical move to his house and her life would be transformed into something right out of a fairytale. But sadly, her cherished fantasies couldn't possibly be farther from reality. There was no warm welcome when she arrived to meet Steve and his new wife, Laurene. There wasn't even so much as a, "We're glad you're here." The only thing that made her feel like there was any hope at all was a brief and baffling encounter with her father in the hallway, when, out of the blue, he asked, "Do you want to change your name?"

Only thirteen, Lisa was confused by the question and she was even more confused when he clarified, "My name." Writing that she originally thought he meant changing her name from "Lisa" to "Steve," the author recalls that the prospect of taking her father's last name didn't really make her feel any better. On one hand, she hoped it might make her feel like she really belonged in his family; she could easily see herself becoming Lisa Jobs and loving it. But on the other hand, she worried about how the change would affect her mother. Chrisann felt guilty enough about her only child being forcibly removed from her home and she was still bitter about the fact that Steve was on the cover of TIME magazine while she was barely scraping by. Lisa knew her mother would feel terrible if she thought that Lisa was rejecting her by taking Steve's last name after he had abandoned them both. So, in the end, she settled on a compromise: she kept her mother's last name and took her father's, hyphenating them.

Unfortunately, however, her compromise wasn't quite as successful as she'd hoped. It still unsettled Chrisann and it didn't make her transition to her father's home any easier. Because despite her attempts to be helpful--actively seeking chores, offering to babysit, thanking Steve and Laurene every chance she got-- her dad still seemed to resent her presence in his life. She thought he might be impressed if she did well in school, so Lisa studied

hard and went out of her way to find meaningful extra-curriculars, even going so far as to start an Opera Club at her school and get elected freshman class president. But still, nothing pleased Steve.

Instead of being proud, he organized her after-school pickup in such a way that it deliberately conflicted with her schedule, causing her to miss Opera Club and student council meetings. And when Lisa got a bike with her own money so she could finally organize her own reliable transportation, he refused to replace it when it was stolen. And although she wanted nothing more than to feel like a part of the family, Steve often excluded her from family outings, yet hypocritically accused Lisa of being ungrateful and rejecting him when she went to a sleepover with a friend. As the years wore on, it became readily apparent that her life with her father wasn't a fairytale, it was a nightmare.

## Lisa Used Academic Success to Win Approval

The author recalls that one morning, during her senior year of high-school, she all but re-wall-papered the house with handmade posters that read, in big letters, "I GOT IN! I GOT IN! I GOT IN!" She did it while everyone else was asleep because Lisa had been up since 4:30 that morning, calling her dream school's admissions department at the moment they opened (7:30 a.m. for the rest of the country, 3 hours ahead of California time). The call revealed that Lisa had indeed been accepted. And the school of her dreams just so happened to be Harvard.

Yet, despite the fact that even applying to Harvard would be a magnanimous occasion for any high-school student and the great irony that Lisa's father was one of the country's most brilliant minds, her application had not been a family affair. In fact, not only had Steve not helped with Lisa's application, he hadn't even known she sent it in. Looking back, Lisa remarks that she applied to Harvard in the first place-- and declined to share the information with her father-- because he repeatedly insinuated that she was unintelligent and incapable of success. In fact, almost thirty years after the insults were initially lobbed at her, the author still remembers driving past a strip club called Ruby's with her father and hearing him say, "That's where you'll end up working." To this day, she honestly can't say if he meant it in jest or not.

With that in mind, it's hardly surprising that Lisa hoped Harvard would be a sort of golden ticket. Moving in with her father had not proved the fairy tale she'd hoped for, but maybe admission to a prestigious university would help her win his approval. Sadly, however, this also proved to be an empty hope. There were no celebrations, no graduation parties; if anything, Steve seemed scornful of her accomplishment after having given up on college himself. And even though Lisa was successful at Harvard, earning great grades and writing for the school's literary review, she still recalls her time in college as the loneliest and most disappointing time of her life.

# The Tragic Circus

An invitation to attend the circus sounds innocent enough, right? Circuses typically herald laughter and fun, a few hours of wonder and entertainment. But for Lisa, it was the final nail in the coffin of her relationship with her father. She could never have known it would be so, however; at the time the invitation was issued, she was home from college for the summer and visiting her mother. After years of tension and sporadic visits, their relationship was finally starting to heal and Lisa was grateful for the opportunity. It couldn't have come at a better time, either; her senior year in college found her sinking slowly into depression and she needed all the warmth and affection she could get.

That's why, when her father called and invited her to see Cirque du Soleil with himself, Laurene, and their son Reed, Lisa turned down the invitation in favor of spending time with her mother. But to her absolute astonishment, Steve responded by accusing her of rejecting him and their family and added that if she didn't go to the circus, she would have to move out. Shattered and stunned, Lisa turned to some family friends in desperation, choosing to spend time with her mother anyway and risk the fallout. Because her mother's living situation was still unstable, she couldn't offer Lisa a place to stay, so Lisa's senior year would be spent ping-ponging between her dorm and a neighbor's house during breaks. However, her return to college offered one final unpleasant surprise: her father had declined to pay her tuition fees that year.

Realizing that her father had truly cut her off, expecting her to literally sacrifice her education over attending an evening at the circus, Lisa was devastated. And although that same kind neighbor came to her aid again, paying for her last year of college, Lisa never forgot her father's unexpected betrayal or the lasting pain it caused her. Despite that, however, she still continued to reach out, still attempted to forge a relationship with her baffling and distant father. Yet despite Lisa's valiant efforts, Steve ignored her calls and emails almost until the day he died.

## Finding Her Father's True Feelings

By the time Steve finally decided to reconnect with Lisa, it was almost too late; it was only when he was nearing death that he reached out to her again. Even in this, however, there was no grand reconciliation, no apologies, and no declarations of love. It was nothing like Lisa had ever hoped it would be, but it was a sliver of a relationship and she accepted it nonetheless. And ultimately, she was glad she had done so, because it helped her discover the answer to one of her biggest questions.

You see, between 1977 and 1978, Steve was tinkering with a new model of computer. It was a primitive predecessor to what would ultimately become the Mac and it hit the market right after Lisa was born. It was also, ironically, called the Lisa. It should have been obvious that Steve named the computer after his newborn daughter, but he denied it for no less than twenty-seven years and the true answer to that question had been bugging Lisa all her life. In fact, “Did you name the Lisa after me?” was one of the first questions she asked her father after moving in with him. She had even heard his wife and friends ask the question, yet Steve maintained his denial.

It was only years later, when Lisa was twenty-seven, that Bono (yes, the Bono of the band U2!) asked Steve in front of Lisa and her father replied, “Well, obviously it was named after my daughter.” To this day, Lisa has no idea why her father kept up the act for twenty-seven years. It makes no sense that he couldn't have simply offered her this shred of affection and admitted that he loved her so much, he named one of his inventions after her. And he's never offered an explanation for that mystery or any other aspect of his cold and baffling treatment throughout her life. However, Lisa did get one brief consolation: on his death-bed, her father tearfully told her, “I didn't spend enough time with you when you were little and now it's too late.” But that's the only apology she ever received.

## Final Summary

It's easy to romanticize famous people and imagine they're somehow superhuman; in fact, Lisa knows that all too well. But as her relationship with her father proves, famous people are every bit as fallible as anybody else. And even though Steve Jobs' legacy lives on, inspiring us to remember him as one of America's most brilliant minds, an inventor who forever changed life as we know it, he's also just another absent father who failed to give his children what they needed to survive.

Lisa's story is proof of this and it's a sobering reminder that being the child of a celebrity isn't all it's cracked up to be. Fame doesn't protect you or your loved ones from hardship, as Lisa has seen first-hand. And although her father finally admitted that he wished he'd spent more time with her, his cold and distant treatment throughout her life has left Lisa with a pervasive loneliness and sense of being unloved.



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