

Tell  
Me  
Who I Am



# Tell Me Who I Am

Alex and Marcus Lewis  
with Joanna Hodgkin

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This book is a work of non-fiction based on the experiences and recollections of the authors. In some cases the names of people, places and details of events have been changed to protect the privacy of others.

First published in Great Britain in 2013 by Hodder & Stoughton  
An Hachette UK company

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN 978 1 444 75726 2  
Trade Paperback ISBN 978 1 444 75727 9  
Ebook ISBN 978 1 444 75729 3

Typeset by Hewer Text UK Ltd, Edinburgh  
Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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Hodder & Stoughton Ltd  
338 Euston Road  
London NW1 3BH

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We want to acknowledge the extraordinary individuals who happened to enter our lives almost like guardian angels just when we needed them most: the Hudsons, the Brockways, the Richardsons, the Taylors and the Handleys who made all the difference in our childhood. Also our long-suffering business partner and friend, James Burton. Without all your help, we would not have made it through.

To you, to our siblings Amanda and Oliver, and to our wives, this book is dedicated with gratitude and love.

‘I am not what happened to me. I am what I choose to become.’

C G Jung



## Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	I
<i>Prologue</i>	7
PART I: THE FIRST STORY	9
1. 'O Brave New World'	11
2. Memory Bank Deleted	16
3. 'MarcusandAli'	20
4. Bramley Grange Hotel	23
5. Our Kind of People	26
6. And Friends	32
7. A Wasted Education	37
8. The Gift of a Future	40
9. Gordon	44
10. Morels	50
11. The QE2	56
12. The University of Travel	60
13. Breakaway	68
14. Twin Decs	73
15. Masonic Funeral	77
16. Birthday Alarms	81

TELL ME WHO I AM

17. Beginnings and an End	87
18. The Ring	92
19. Family Urns	97
20. Dukestonbury	102
21. Discoveries	106
22. Carol Vorderman and <i>Mysteries</i>	112
23. Vivien	118
24. The Workshop: Saturday	123
25. The Workshop: Sunday	126
26. Is It True?	133
27. Beginning Again	137

PART II: THE SECOND STORY 141

1. Egypt	143
2. Camilla	146
3. Soul-Searching	150
4. Bad Education	158
5. Escape	164
6. Passing Around	171
7. A Conventional Girl	176
8. A Suitable Marriage	181
9. 'The New Jill'	188
10. Fundu Escape	192
11. Hombres	200
12. 'Good Old Jill!'	204
13. An Island Hotel	210
14. Secrets on Top of Secrets	214
15. Vendetta	218



CONTENTS

16. Children Without a Father	222
17. A New Father	228
18. Lucinda	231
19. First Wedding	236
20. Vito	240
21. A Second Wedding	246
22. Going Public	249
PART III: THE THIRD STORY	253
1. October 2011	255
2. A Family Together	259
3. The Night Life Changed	268
4. Scotland	279
5. Ripples	291
6. 'Normal'	297
7. A Different Person?	303
8. The Children's Home	307
9. 'Out Is Better'	311
10. Repercussions	324
11. A Public Outcry	327
12. Closure?	332
<i>Epilogue</i>	337



## *Introduction*

I recognised them at once. Two men with the same beaky, attractive features and eager grins, both wearing shirts printed with small blue flowers. Not exactly the same, but similar. (Had they randomly chosen floral shirts for this meeting, or was this one of those recurring twin coincidences that are more than mere coincidence? The mysteries of identical twinship are, to an outsider, infinitely fascinating.)

Over the next hour I got an impression of them which grew and developed over the following months, but never fundamentally changed. They were and are two of the most engaging and likeable people I've ever met: funny, vulnerable, open, entertaining, self-absorbed and yet in some strange way selfless as well. And they have an underlying innocence that is truly remarkable. I knew the outlines of their story, and knowing what I did, I was astonished by the speed with which they were prepared to trust their history to me, a complete stranger. Just as they now trust their history to you, the reader of this extraordinary saga.

At the end of that first unforgettable afternoon, Alex said to me, 'I want to write this book because I want to know who I am.'

Because at that stage of his journey, he reckoned he only knew about 30%: the rest was confusion, a cacophony of overlapping narratives, sometimes contradictory, sometimes a blur, sometimes downright wrong. *Game on*, I thought. The storyteller in me recognised this would be a major undertaking. Forget the urge to name the murderer or follow the hunt for true love and happiness: the quest to uncover his hidden identity was as powerful a motivation as I've ever known. And the process of writing the book became a key element in the book itself.

Which makes it a different kind of narrative. If you are looking for a straightforward kind of account, stop right here. Alex and Marcus's story is infinitely more complex and interesting than that, and for the sake of clarity, it is divided into three parts.

The first section pieces together the world of family, home and friends that Alex discovered when he woke from his coma in the late summer of 1982 with his memories erased, never to return. With his twin Marcus to guide him, he was slowly able to create a personal history and a sense of self that carried him through for more than ten years.

Then, at the age of thirty-two, he discovered that a large chunk of his early life had been omitted from the picture Marcus had helped him to assemble. Painfully, doggedly, he started the process again, gradually piecing together a new version of his story. This process forms the second section of the book.

The third part covers the revelations that emerged, sometimes with shocking suddenness, while we worked together

## INTRODUCTION

on the book. During long sessions in my flat, over meals and endless cups of tea, interrupted by phone calls and visits and the random minutiae of daily life, with laughter and strong emotion and a constant struggle to nail down a kind of truth, we forged a new narrative. It has been an astonishing journey for all of us.

It's a journey in which we've all had much to discover. Though I've worked with people with troubled pasts before, I am far from an expert. One of the things that has struck me most forcibly throughout Alex and Marcus's story is the way the child who experiences major trauma holds different and apparently contradictory realities in their mind and heart at the same time. This was what Marcus taught us: that he both knew, and did not know, what was buried in their past. On one level he remembered daily; on another level he had managed to completely forget. Thus his apparently contradictory statements: 'It never happened to me.' 'I never thought about it.' 'I always knew I'd have to tell him.' 'It was always there.'

All true.

Because some children survive from day to day by having no past. Yesterday is a blank and Now can be erased if it becomes too much to bear. If the present can be wiped and the past is a moveable feast, normal definitions of Truth and Lies are an irrelevance. This was endlessly fascinating, but also a challenge. One of their closest friends said to me, 'I wondered how this woman was ever going to write their story: one twin can't remember anything and the other never tells the truth!'

And yet Marcus, whenever he strikes a core of truth, is one of the most courageously honest people I know.

Still, for readers who have grown up in a mostly happy family, this can be hard to disentangle. But stay with it. Through Alex and Marcus, and their extraordinary quest, there is much that touches all our lives.

The second thing I've learned is how complex the ties of family, love and betrayal can be. Quite early on in our discussions, Marcus mentioned being struck by an interview he'd heard on the radio. A young woman who had been subjected to years of beatings from her father was asked how she felt about him now that he was dead. She said simply, 'I miss him.' Not the beatings, obviously, but the chance to have a decent parent, now gone forever. The interviewer was startled, but Marcus knew just what she meant.

There are individuals in this book who have done wicked and cruel things to those they should have been protecting, but there are no monsters. It would have been easier, perhaps, if we could dismiss the villains in this tale as monsters, but that would be to miss the point entirely.

This is a story that is far from over, and far from complete. It's a truism that even in a relatively uncomplicated family there will be differing perspectives, contradictory memories, conflicting versions of characters and events. In a family like Alex and Marcus's, a single final true account is a chimera, forever out of reach. This is their reality and it will always be fluid.

But for me, perhaps the most remarkable gift from working with them has been an affirmation of the endless resources of

## INTRODUCTION

the human spirit. Despite what they suffered as children, they have gone on to achieve so much. They are successful entrepreneurs, respected around the world for the hotel they have built on a magical island. They have a huge, loyal circle of friends, some of whom have known them for thirty years. They grew up with secrets and lies, yet they are open and, in some fundamental way, completely honest. They are loving husbands and fathers who have broken the chain of secrets and self-interest.

Their history throws up endless questions: what is the alchemy that makes one person choose to destroy the lives of those closest to them while others strive to create something inspirational? What are the forces that really shape us?

Every person's history is unique, but it is hard to think of two lives with as many extraordinary elements as theirs: memory and identity, twinship and torn loyalties, truth and fiction, low life and high society.

This is their world. It is a world I have been privileged to share in for a while.

Read it, and be amazed.

*Joanna Hodgkin*

London

March 2013





## *Prologue*

**T**he first time my life changed direction I was three weeks old. My father and I were in an accident: for a few days we were both on life-support machines. The second time I was eighteen and another accident radically altered my life; the after-effects are with me today. I lost my first eighteen years, and they never returned. The third time, although not an accident, was the most dramatic. I was thirty-two and discovered extraordinary intrigue in my family and I had to start again. This time around, recovery was never going to be straightforward.

This could have been a dark story. But through it all, my twin brother Marcus has made all the difference. As babies we were hardly ever separated and as children we were always together. As adults we have worked together and sometimes gone our separate ways, but the bond between us has never been broken. With the help of Marcus, and my wife Camilla who has been my rock throughout this, I have come through.

It was only after doing a Radio 4 interview about a snippet of my life that I realised why I needed to tell this story. The response to that brief interview showed me how my story

TELL ME WHO I AM

might make a difference to many people who've lived in silence too long. If any of this resonates with your experience then this book is especially for you.

Alex Lewis

PART I

*The First Story*



I

*'O Brave New World'*

Guildford Hospital, August 1982.

Marcus Lewis sat beside the metal bed in the corner of the ward. He was hunched forward, watching for the smallest sign. His brother had lain there for over a week. Alex was immobile, unreachable, his eyes closed and his breathing shallow – just as he had been since the last night of July, when he had fallen off the back of a motorbike, smashed onto the tarmac and fractured his skull. By the time the first morning of August dawned, he had slipped into unconsciousness.

The face Marcus was looking at was his own face, reflecting back his features, handsome, with dark hair and eyes that had been quick to smile, but subtly altered now, gaunt and pale in the aftermath of the accident. He and Alex were identical twins, always together, mirroring each other's gestures, laugh and voice. Even their close friends had difficulty telling them apart. Marcus was talking to Alex as he had been all week, chatting about their home and friends, what he had been doing, what people had been saying. Nothing all that important. Just keeping the channels of communication open.

In the ward, nurses and auxiliaries carried on with their daily tasks: checking blood pressure and handing out meals, dealing with visitors and examinations. The squeak of trolleys

and screens, footsteps on linoleum, the clatter of crockery, the murmur of voices. Since the accident, Marcus's life had narrowed to the micro-world of this ward, this chair, this small patch of floor and this narrow space beside his brother's bed.

The doctors had done what they could to prepare him and their mother Jill for the worst. They had assured them that Alex would come round eventually – but what would he be like? Would he still be Alex? The head injury was severe, and complicated by the fact that he had fractured his skull as a baby. There was a chance he would be permanently brain-damaged, perhaps even a vegetable. Their mother was growing desperate. But Marcus was certain that behind the mask of unconsciousness, Alex remained essentially the same as always. He knew because the unspoken thread of communication that connected them as twins had never been broken. He knew in the same way that he had known, waking early in the morning of 1 August, that something terrible had happened to Alex.

Born within five minutes of each other, alike as two peas in a pod, they had a connection beyond words.

Marcus had sat beside his brother's bed for hours every day. Long hours of waiting and worry.

And then after several days, without warning, Alex opened his eyes. He looked directly at his twin. And he spoke. His voice was faint, and croaky from lack of use. But the words were clear.

'Hello, Marcus,' he said.

The effect was electric.

All around them, the room erupted in pandemonium. Nurses and doctors stopped what they were doing and gathered

round the bed. Their mother raced over from the nurses' station. She was overjoyed. Alex had come round! He could speak! He recognised Marcus and he was going to be all right!

Alex held his brother's gaze. He frowned. The noise was bothering him.

Jill, their mother, was never a quiet woman, even under normal circumstances. Now her raptures at the recovery of her son echoed through the ward. But soon her joy turned to dismay. Something was wrong. What was happening? Why wasn't he thrilled to see her? She couldn't make it out at all.

Her precious son had recognised his twin at once.

But he did not seem to know who she was.

Everyone was crowding round the bed. Alex spoke again to Marcus, but this time his voice was tinged with fear: 'Who is that woman?'

'That's our mother,' Marcus told him.

The information did not make any kind of sense. As far as Alex was concerned, the middle-aged woman who was creating such a hullabaloo was a total stranger. He'd never even seen her before.

He didn't remember anything.

For Alex – even now, thirty years later – that moment of emerging from unconsciousness marks the start of his known life. Day one. A new beginning. 'My earliest memory, and I'll never forget it, is seeing Marcus. And then seeing this hysterical woman round the bed. A very tall, loud, quite large lady with dark hair, running round the room quite hysterically.'

Jill refused to accept that her son did not know who she was.

By this point she was shouting, 'Hello, darling! Hello, hello, HELLO!'

When the medical staff realised her behaviour was distressing their patient, they asked her to step outside the room for a bit. She refused, and tried even harder. She had a fluting, upper-class voice; the sort of voice that expects to be heard. And obeyed at once.

'Of *course* he knows who I am! He's my son! Hello, darling. *Hello!*'

Eventually they persuaded her to leave, and Alex slipped back into unconsciousness.

Already the pattern had been established. Alex never remembered his mother and she never accepted that he could recognise his twin brother, but not her.

But that's exactly what had happened. At that moment in the hospital room, Alex had opened his eyes on a world where everything and everyone – apart from Marcus – was strange and unfamiliar. He didn't even know his own name. He was drowning in confusion, and Marcus was his only chance of staying afloat. He depended on his twin for everything.

In August 1982, when they were both eighteen, Marcus became, in effect, his memory. As Alex says now, from the moment he emerged into consciousness, 'I lived my life through Marcus.'

Marcus had to tell him everything. About his home, his friends, his family. His life. Who he was.

Well, almost everything.

There was never a moment when Marcus made a conscious decision to withhold some crucial information about their



O BRAVE NEW WORLD

early life. To begin with, it never came up. He was too busy dealing with practicalities. But, as he steered his brother through the days, there were memories he never shared, uncomfortable truths he glossed over, gaps that he allowed Alex to fill with 'normal' family details. Alex never had a clue that their family was very far from normal.

Marcus acted out of love. He also acted to protect himself.

He might have been doing Alex a favour.

Certainly Alex, by losing his memory, gave his twin an unexpected gift and made it possible for Marcus not to lose his own memory, exactly – that luxury was denied him – but to bury it. To bury it for years.

For more than a decade Alex pieced his story together, never imagining that the picture that emerged was only half the truth.

The good half.

The rest stayed where Marcus felt it belonged. Hidden away.