

Sweet and Low: A Family Story

By Rich Cohen

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Sweet and Low is the bittersweet, hilarious story of Ben Eisenstadt, who invented sugar packets and Sweet'N Low, and amassed the great fortune that would later destroy his family. It is a story of immigrants, Jewish gangsters, and Brooklyn; of sugar, saccharine, obesity, and diet crazes; of jealousy, betrayal, and ambition. Disinherited along with his mother and siblings, Rich Cohen has written a rancorous, colorful history of his extraordinary family and their pursuit of the American dream.

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Sweet and Low: A Family Story By Rich Cohen Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Sweet and Low by Richard Cohen bills itself as "the unauthorized true story of one Brooklyn family." And what a family. Cohen, the disinherited grandson of the artificial sweetener Sweet 'n' Low's inventor, combines two parts Horatio Alger-memoir, one part cultural commentary and three parts personal criticism into a fascinating snapshot of American life, immigrant experience and a broad sermon on the perils of fortune. Cohen's maternal grandfather, Ben Eisenstadt, a mid-grade inventor and Brooklyn restaurateur concocts the idea of selling sugar in individual packets--a revolutionary concept in the age of crusty, unsanitary sugar dispensers. His idea stolen by the big sugar companies, Cohen squeaks out a post-war living selling his packets in their shadow until he and his son, Marvin, invent the formula for the saccharine sweetener and catch the first big wave of the American diet craze. Those little pink packets create a vast fortune soon tarnished by interfamily squabbles, Mafia influence, FDA edicts and, mostly, the baser aspects of human nature--greed, jealousy and pride. Cohen, a writer for *Rolling Stone* and *The New Yorker*, among other publications, weaves a compelling and often biting narrative about his mother's family. Using those pink packets as metaphor, he paints a dystopic portrait of the American Dream, that, in his family's case, was as devoid of nourishment as any artificial sweetener.--*Jeremy Pugh*

From Publishers Weekly
Disinherited from the family fortune built by his maternal grandfather, Ben Eisenstadt, who invented the artificial sweetener Sweet'N Low, Cohen mines a wealth of family history in this funny, angry, digressive memoir. Ben worked as a short-order cook during the Depression and conceived of but failed to patent the sugar packet before he and his son Marvin hit pay dirt in the 1950s with the saccharin formula for Sweet'N Low. Today a distant third to Equal and Splenda, Sweet'N Low is run by Marvin's son Jeff, who took over after Marvin and several other chief officers were charged with tax evasion and criminal conspiracy in 1993. This story of the family-owned, Brooklyn-based company is, at its heart, a tale of immigrant strife and Cohen's fractious Jewish clan, including his grandmother Betty, for whom "love is finite," and his hypochondriac, housebound Aunt Gladys ("a tongue probing a sore"), who connived to eliminate her sister (Cohen's mother) from Betty's will. Though Cohen often dollies back in a self-conscious if breezy effort to pad his memoir with big ideas—the history of artificial sweeteners, the post-WWII weight-watching craze, etc.—the real grace of his writing (seen in *Tough Jews*) lies in the merciless, comic characterizations of his relatives. Photos. *(Apr. 11)*
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From The New Yorker
Cohen's unflinching and hilarious account of his family begins with his grandfather, a lawyer turned cafeteria counterman who "built the fortune that would be the cause of all the trouble." Combining saccharin, a powder three hundred times as sweet as sugar, with lactose, he produced the sugar substitute Sweet'N Low, which went on sale in 1957, in its iconic pink packets. It was aimed at diabetics, but diet mania made it ubiquitous, and by 1975 the family factory, in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, was producing forty million packets a day. Cohen, whose branch of the family was disinherited in a power struggle, acidly narrates the gradual unravelling of the family and its fortune, and detours through the histories of sugar, Brooklyn, dieting, and packaged foods. The nadir came in 1993, when federal agents raided the factory; a reputed mafioso who had been put in charge of lobbying against a saccharin ban had funnelled illegal contributions to politicians and bilked the company of millions.
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